

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," &c.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT had happened at Aldborough, in Captain Wragge's absence?

These were the events that occurred, from the time of his departure to the time of his return.

As soon as the chaise had left North Shingles, Mrs. Wragge received the message which her husband had charged the servant to deliver. She hastened into the parlour, bewildered by her stormy interview with the captain, and penitently conscious that she had done wrong, without knowing what the wrong was. If Magdalen's mind had been unoccupied by the one idea of the marriage which now filled it—if she had possessed composure enough to listen to Mrs. Wragge's rambling narrative of what had happened during her interview with the housekeeper—Mrs. Lecount's visit to the wardrobe must, sooner or later, have formed part of the disclosure; and Magdalen, although she might never have guessed the truth, must at least have been warned that there was some element of danger lurking treacherously in the Alpaca dress. As it was, no such consequence as this followed Mrs. Wragge's appearance in the parlour; for no such consequence was now possible.

Events which had happened earlier in the morning, events which had happened for days and weeks past, had vanished as completely from Magdalen's mind, as if they had never taken place. The horror of the coming Monday—the merciless certainty implied in the appointment of the day and hour—petrified all feeling in her, and annihilated all thought. Mrs. Wragge made three separate attempts to enter on the subject of the housekeeper's visit. The first time she might as well have addressed herself to the wind, or to the sea. The second attempt seemed likely to be more successful. Magdalen sighed, listened for a moment indifferently, and then dismissed the subject. "It doesn't matter," she said. "The end has come all the same. I'm not angry with you. Say no more." Later in the day, from not knowing what else to talk about, Mrs. Wragge tried again. This time, Magdalen turned on her impatiently. "For God's sake, don't worry me about trifles! I

can't bear it." Mrs. Wragge closed her lips on the spot, and returned to the subject no more. Magdalen, who had been kind to her at all other times, had angrily forbidden it. The captain—utterly ignorant of Mrs. Lecount's interest in the secrets of the wardrobe—had never so much as approached it. All the information that he had extracted from his wife's mental confusion, he had extracted by putting direct questions, derived purely from the resources of his own knowledge. He had insisted on plain answers, without excuses of any kind; he had carried his point as usual; and his departure the same morning had left him no chance of reopening the question, even if his irritation against his wife had permitted him to do so. There the Alpaca dress hung, neglected in the dark; the unnoticed, unsuspected centre of dangers that were still to come.

Towards the afternoon, Mrs. Wragge took courage to start a suggestion of her own—she pleaded for a little turn in the fresh air.

Magdalen passively put on her hat; passively accompanied her companion along the public walk, until they reached its northward extremity. Here the beach was left solitary, and here they sat down, side by side, on the shingle. It was a bright exhilarating day; pleasure-boats were sailing on the calm blue water; Aldborough was idling happily afloat and ashore. Mrs. Wragge recovered her spirits in the gaiety of the prospect—she amused herself, like a child, by tossing pebbles into the sea. From time to time she stole a questioning glance at Magdalen, and saw no encouragement in her manner, no change to cordiality in her face. She sat silent on the slope of the shingle, with her elbow on her knee, and her head resting on her hand, looking out over the sea—looking with a rapt attention, and yet with eyes that seemed to notice nothing. Mrs. Wragge wearied of the pebbles, and lost her interest in looking at the pleasure-boats. Her great head began to nod heavily, and she dozed in the warm drowsy air. When she woke, the pleasure-boats were far off; their sails were white specks in the distance. The idlers on the beach were thinned in number; the sun was low in the heaven; the blue sea was darker, and rippled by a breeze. Changes on sky and earth and ocean told of the waning day; change was everywhere—except close at her side. There Magdalen sat, in the same position,

with weary eyes that still looked over the sea, and still saw nothing.

"Oh, do speak to me!" said Mrs. Wragge.

Magdalen started, and looked about her vacantly.

"It's late," she said, shivering under the first sensation that reached her of the rising breeze. "Come home; you want your tea."

They walked home in silence.

"Don't be angry with me for asking," said Mrs. Wragge, as they sat together at the tea-table. "Are you troubled, my dear, in your mind?"

"Yes," replied Magdalen. "Don't notice me. My trouble will soon be over."

She waited patiently until Mrs. Wragge had made an end of the meal, and then went upstairs to her own room.

"Monday!" she said, as she sat down at her toilette-table. "Something may happen before Monday comes!"

Her fingers wandered mechanically among the brushes and combs, the tiny bottles and cases placed on the table. She set them in order, now in one way, and now in another—then on a sudden pushed them away from her in a heap. For a minute or two her hands remained idle. That interval passed, they grew restless again, and pulled the two little drawers in the table backwards and forwards in their grooves. Among the trifles laid in one of them was a Prayer-Book, which had belonged to her at Combe-Raven, and which she had saved with her other relics of the past, when she and her sister had taken their farewell of home. She opened the Prayer-Book, after a long hesitation, at the Marriage Service—shut it again, before she had read a line—and put it back hurriedly in one of the drawers. After turning the key in the lock, she rose, and walked to the window.

"The horrible sea!" she said, turning from it with a shudder of disgust. "The lonely, dreary, horrible sea!"

She went back to the drawer, and took the Prayer-Book out for the second time; half-opened it again at the Marriage Service; and impatiently threw it back into the drawer. This time, after turning the lock, she took the key away—walked with it in her hand to the open window—and threw it violently from her into the garden. It fell on a bed thickly planted with flowers. It was invisible: it was lost. The sense of its loss seemed to relieve her.

"Something may happen on Friday; something may happen on Saturday; something may happen on Sunday. Three days still!"

She closed the green shutters outside the window, and drew the curtains, to darken the room still more. Her head felt heavy; her eyes were burning hot. She threw herself on her bed, with a sullen impulse to sleep away the time.

The quiet of the house helped her, the darkness of the room helped her; the stupor of mind into which she had fallen had its effect on her senses: she dropped into a broken sleep. Her

restless hands moved incessantly; her head tossed from side to side of the pillow—but still she slept. Ere long, words fell by ones and twos from her lips; words whispered in her sleep, growing more and more continuous, more and more articulate, the longer the sleep lasted; words which seemed to calm her restlessness, and to lull her into deeper repose. She smiled; she was in the happy land of dreams—Frank's name escaped her. "Do you love me, Frank?" she whispered. "Oh, my darling, say it again! say it again!"

The time passed, the room grew darker; and still she slumbered and dreamed. Towards sunset—without any noise inside the house or out to account for it—she started up on the bed, awake again in an instant. The drowsy obscurity of the room struck her with terror. She ran to the window, pushed open the shutters, and leaned far out into the evening air and the evening light. Her eyes devoured the trivial sights on the beach; her ears drank in the welcome murmur of the sea. Anything to deliver her from the waking impressions which her dreams had left! No more darkness; no more repose. Sleep that came mercifully to others, came treacherously to her. Sleep had only closed her eyes on the future, to open them on the past.

She went down again into the parlour, eager to talk—no matter how idly, no matter on what trifles. The room was empty. Perhaps Mrs. Wragge had gone to her work—perhaps, she was too tired to talk. Magdalen took her hat from the table, and went out. The sea that she had shrunk from, a few hours since, looked friendly now. How lovely it was in its cool evening blue! What a godlike joy in the happy multitude of waves, leaping up to the light of Heaven!

She stayed out, until the night fell and the stars appeared. The night steadied her.

By slow degrees, her mind recovered its balance, and she looked her position unflinchingly in the face. The vain hope that accident might defeat the very end for which, of her own free will, she had ceaselessly plotted and toiled, vanished and left her; self-dissipated in its own weakness. She knew the true alternative, and faced it. On one side was the revolting ordeal of the marriage—on the other, the abandonment of her purpose. Was it too late to choose between the sacrifice of the purpose, and the sacrifice of herself? Yes! too late. The backward path had closed behind her. Time that no wish could change, Time that no prayers could recall, had made her purpose a part of herself: once she had governed it; now it governed her. The more she shrank, the harder she struggled, the more mercilessly it drove her on. No other feeling in her was strong enough to master it—not even the horror that was maddening her; the horror of her marriage.

Towards nine o'clock she went back to the house.

"Walking again!" said Mrs. Wragge, meet-

ing her at the door. "Come in and sit down, my dear. How tired you must be!"

Magdalen smiled, and patted Mrs. Wragge kindly on the shoulder.

"You forget how strong I am," she said. "Nothing hurts me."

She lit her candle, and went up-stairs again into her room. As she returned to the old place by her toilette-table, the vain hope in the three days of delay, the vain hope of deliverance by accident, came back to her—this time, in a form more tangible than the form which it had hitherto worn.

"Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Something may happen to him; something may happen to me. Something serious; something fatal. One of us may die."

A sudden change came over her face. She shivered, though there was no cold in the air. She started, though there was no noise to alarm her.

"One of us may die. I may be the one."

She fell into deep thought—roused herself, after a while—and, opening the door, called to Mrs. Wragge to come and speak to her.

"You were right in thinking I should fatigue myself," she said. "My walk has been a little too much for me. I feel tired; and I am going to bed. Good night." She kissed Mrs. Wragge, and softly closed the door again.

After a few turns backwards and forwards in the room, she abruptly opened her writing-case and began a letter to her sister. The letter grew and grew under her hands; she filled sheet after sheet of note-paper. Her heart was full of her subject: it was her own story addressed to Norah. She shed no tears; she was composed to a quiet sadness. Her pen ran smoothly on. After writing for more than two hours, she left off while the letter was still unfinished. There was no signature attached to it—there was a blank space reserved to be filled up at some other time. After putting away the case, with the sheets of writing secured inside it, she walked to the window for air, and stood there looking out.

The moon was waning over the sea. The breeze of the earlier hours had died out. On earth and ocean, the spirit of the Night brooded in a deep and awful calm.

Her head drooped low on her bosom, and all the view waned before her eyes with the waning moon. She saw no sea, no sky. Death, the Tempter, was busy at her heart. Death, the Tempter, pointed homeward, to the grave of her dead parents in Combe-Raven churchyard.

"Nineteen last birthday," she thought. "Only nineteen!" She moved away from the window—hesitated—and then looked out again at the view. "The beautiful night!" she said, gratefully. "Oh, the beautiful night!"

She left the window, and laid down on her bed. Sleep that had come treacherously before, came mercifully now; came deep and dreamless, the

image of her last waking thought—the image of Death.

Early the next morning, Mrs. Wragge went into Magdalen's room, and found that she had risen betimes. She was sitting before the glass, drawing the comb slowly through and through her hair—thoughtful and quiet.

"How do you feel this morning, my dear?" asked Mrs. Wragge. "Quite well again?"

"Yes."

After replying in the affirmative, she stopped, considered for a moment, and suddenly contradicted herself. "No," she said, "not quite well. I am suffering a little from toothache." As she altered her first answer in those words, she gave a twist to her hair with the comb, so that it fell forward and hid her face.

At breakfast she was very silent; and she took nothing but a cup of tea.

"Let me go to the chemist's and get something," said Mrs. Wragge.

"No, thank you."

"Do let me!"

"No!"

She refused for the second time sharply and angrily. As usual, Mrs. Wragge submitted, and let her have her own way. When breakfast was over she rose, without a word of explanation, and went out. Mrs. Wragge watched her from the window, and saw that she took the direction of the chemist's shop.

On reaching the chemist's door, she stopped—paused, before entering the shop, and looked in at the window—hesitated, and walked away a little—hesitated again—and took the first turning which led back to the beach.

Without looking about her, without caring what place she chose, she seated herself on the shingle. The only persons who were near to her, in the position she now occupied, were a nursemaid and two little boys. The youngest of the two had a tiny toy-ship in his hand. After looking at Magdalen for a little while, with the quaintest gravity and attention, the boy suddenly approached her; and opened the way to an acquaintance by putting his toy composedly on her lap.

"Look at my ship," said the child, crossing his hands on Magdalen's knee.

She was not usually patient with children. In happier days, she would not have met the boy's advance towards her, as she met it now. The hard despair in her eyes left them suddenly; her fast-closed lips parted, and trembled. She put the ship back into the child's hands, and lifted him on her lap.

"Will you give me a kiss?" she said, faintly.

The boy looked at his ship, as if he would rather have kissed the ship.

She repeated the question—repeated it, almost humbly. The child put his hand up to her neck, and kissed her.

"If I was your sister, would you love me?"

All the misery of her friendless position, all

the wasted tenderness of her heart, poured from her in those words.

"Would you love me?" she repeated, hiding her face on the bosom of the child's frock.

"Yes," said the boy. "Look at my ship."

She looked at the ship through her gathering tears.

"What do you call it?" she asked, trying hard to find her way even to the interest of a child.

"I call it Uncle Kirke's ship," said the boy. "Uncle Kirke has gone away."

The name recalled nothing to her memory. No remembrances but old remembrances lived in her now. "Gone?" she repeated absently, thinking what she should say to her little friend next.

"Yes," said the boy. "Gone to China."

Even from the lips of a child, that word struck her to the heart. She put Kirke's little nephew off her lap, and instantly left the beach.

As she turned back to the house, the struggle of the past night renewed itself in her mind. But the sense of relief which the child had brought to her, the reviving tenderness which she had felt while he sat on her knee, influenced her still. She was conscious of a dawning hope, opening freshly on her thoughts, as the boy's innocent eyes had opened on her face when he came to her on the beach. Was it too late to turn back? Once more, she asked herself that question—and now, for the first time, she asked it in doubt.

She ran up to her own room with a lurking distrust in her changed self, which warned her to act, and not to think. Without waiting to remove her shawl or to take off her hat, she opened her writing-case, and addressed these lines to Captain Wragge, as fast as her pen could trace them.

"You will find the money I promised you enclosed in this. My resolution has failed me. The horror of marrying him is more than I can face. I have left Aldborough. Pity my weakness, and forget me. Let us never meet again."

With throbbing heart, with eager, trembling fingers, she drew her little white silk bag from her bosom, and took out the bank-notes to enclose them in the letter. Her hand searched impetuously; her hand had lost its discrimination of touch. She grasped the whole contents of the bag in one handful of papers; and drew them out violently, tearing some and disarranging the folds of others. As she threw them down before her on the table, the first object that met her eye was her own handwriting, faded already with time. She looked closer, and saw the words she had copied from her dead father's letter—saw the lawyer's brief and terrible commentary on them, confronting her at the bottom of the page:

Mr. Vanstone's daughters are Nobody's Children, and the law leaves them helpless at their uncle's mercy.

Her throbbing heart stopped; her trembling hands grew icily quiet. All the Past rose before her in mute overwhelming reproach. She took up the lines which her own hand had written hardly a minute since, and looked at the ink still wet on the letters, with a vacant incredulity.

The colour that had risen on her cheeks, faded from them once more. The hard despair looked out again, cold and glittering, in her tearless eyes. She folded the bank-notes carefully, and put them back in her bag. She pressed the copy of her father's letter to her lips, and returned it to its place, with the bank-notes. When the bag was in her bosom again, she waited a little, with her face hidden in her hands—then deliberately tore up the lines addressed to Captain Wragge. Before the ink was dry, the letter lay in fragments on the floor.

"No!" she said, as the last morsel of the torn paper dropped from her hand. "On the way I go, there is no turning back."

She rose composedly, and left the room. While descending the stairs she met Mrs. Wragge coming up. "Going out again my dear?" asked Mrs. Wragge. "May I go with you?"

Magdalen's attention wandered. Instead of answering the question, she absently answered her own thoughts.

"Thousands of women marry for money," she said. "Why shouldn't I?"

The helpless perplexity of Mrs. Wragge's face, as she spoke those words, roused her to a sense of present things.

"My poor dear!" she said; "I puzzle you, don't I? Never mind what I say,—all girls talk nonsense; and I'm no better than the rest of them. Come! I'll give you a treat. You shall enjoy yourself while the captain's away. We will have a long drive by ourselves. Put on your smart bonnet, and come with me to the hotel. I'll tell the landlady to put a nice cold dinner into a basket. You shall have all the things you like—and I'll wait on you. When you are an old, old woman, you will remember me kindly, won't you? You will say, 'She wasn't a bad girl; hundreds worse than she was live and prosper, and nobody blames them.' There! there! go and put your bonnet on. Oh, my God, what is my heart made of! How it lives and lives, when other girls' hearts would have died in them long ago!"

In half an hour more, she and Mrs. Wragge were seated together in the carriage. One of the horses was restive at starting. "Flog him!" she cried angrily to the driver. "What are you frightened about? Flog him! Suppose the carriage was upset," she said, turning suddenly to her companion; "and suppose I was thrown out, and killed on the spot? Nonsense! don't look at me in that way. I'm like your husband; I have a dash of humour, and I'm only joking."

They were out the whole day. When they reached home again, it was after dark. The long succession of hours passed in the fresh air, left them both with the same sense of fatigue. Again that night, Magdalen slept the deep dreamless sleep of the night before. And so the Friday closed.

Her last thought at night, had been the thought which had sustained her throughout the day.

She had laid her head on the pillow, with the same reckless resolution to submit to the coming trial, which had already expressed itself in words, when she and Mrs. Wragge met by accident on the stairs. When she woke on the morning of Saturday, the resolution was gone. The Friday's thoughts—the Friday's events even—were blotted out of her mind. Once again, creeping chill through the flow of her young blood, she felt the slow and deadly prompting of despair, which had come to her in the waning moonlight, which had whispered to her in the awful calm.

"I saw the end, as the end must be," she said to herself, "on Thursday night. I have been wrong ever since."

When she and her companion met that morning, she reiterated her complaint of suffering from the toothache; she repeated her refusal to allow Mrs. Wragge to procure a remedy; she left the house after breakfast, in the direction of the chemist's shop, exactly as she had left it on the morning before.

This time she entered the shop without an instant's hesitation.

"I have got an attack of toothache," she said abruptly to an elderly man who stood behind the counter.

"May I look at the tooth, Miss?"

"There is no necessity to look. It is a hollow tooth. I think I have caught cold in it."

The chemist recommended various remedies, which were in vogue fifteen years since. She declined purchasing any of them.

"I have always found Laudanum relieve the pain better than anything else," she said, trifling with the bottles on the counter, and looking at them while she spoke, instead of looking at the chemist. "Let me have some Laudanum."

"Certainly, Miss. Excuse my asking the question—it is only a matter of form. You are staying at Aldborough, I think?"

"Yes. I am Miss Bygrave, of North Shingles."

The chemist bowed; and, turning to his shelves, filled an ordinary half-ounce bottle with laudanum, immediately. In ascertaining his customer's name and address beforehand, the owner of the shop had taken a precaution, which was natural to a careful man—but which was by no means universal, under similar circumstances, in the state of the law at that time.

"Shall I put you up a little cotton wool with the laudanum?" he asked, after he had placed a label on the bottle, and had written a word on it in large letters.

"If you please. What have you just written on the bottle?" She put the question sharply, with something of distrust as well as curiosity in her manner.

The chemist answered the question by turning the label towards her. She saw written on it, in large letters—POISON.

"I like to be on the safe side, Miss," said the old man, smiling. "Very worthy people in other respects, are often sadly careless, where poisons are concerned."

She began trifling again with the bottles on the counter; and put another question, with an ill-concealed anxiety to hear the answer.

"Is there danger," she asked, "in such a little drop of Laudanum as that?"

"There is Death in it, Miss," replied the chemist, quietly.

"Death to a child, or to a person in delicate health?"

"Death to the strongest man in England, let him be who he may."

With that answer, the chemist sealed up the bottle in its wrapping of white paper, and handed the laudanum to Magdalen across the counter. She laughed as she took it from him, and paid for it.

"There will be no fear of accidents at North Shingles," she said. "I shall keep the bottle locked up in my dressing-case. If it doesn't relieve the pain, I must come to you again, and try some other remedy. Good morning."

"Good morning, Miss."

She went straight back to the house, without once looking up, without noticing any one who passed her. She brushed by Mrs. Wragge in the passage, as she might have brushed by a piece of furniture. She ascended the stairs, and caught her foot twice in her dress, from sheer inattention to the common precaution of holding it up. The trivial daily interests of life had lost their hold on her already.

In the privacy of her own room, she took the bottle from its wrapping, and threw the paper and the cotton wool into the fireplace. At the moment when she did this, there was a knock at the door. She hid the little bottle, and looked up impatiently. Mrs. Wragge came into the room.

"Have you got something for your toothache, my dear?"

"Yes."

"Can I do anything to help you?"

"No."

Mrs. Wragge still lingered uneasily near the door. Her manner showed plainly that she had something more to say.

"What is it?" asked Magdalen, sharply.

"Don't be angry," said Mrs. Wragge. "I'm not settled-in my mind about the captain. He's a great writer—and he hasn't written. He's as quick as lightning—and he hasn't come back. Here's Saturday, and no signs of him. Has he run away, do you think? Has anything happened to him?"

"I should think not. Go down stairs; I'll come and speak to you about it, directly."

As soon as she was alone again, Magdalen rose from her chair, advanced towards a cupboard in the room which locked, and paused for a moment, with her hand on the key, in doubt. Mrs. Wragge's appearance had disturbed the whole current of her thoughts. Mrs. Wragge's last question, trifling as it was, had checked her on the verge of the precipice—had roused the old vain hope in her once more of release by accident.

"Why not?" she said. "Why may something not have happened to one of them?"

She placed the laudanum in the cupboard, locked it, and put the key in her pocket. "Time enough still," she thought, "before Monday. I'll wait till the captain comes back."

After some consultation down stairs, it was agreed that the servant should sit up that night, in expectation of her master's return. The day passed quietly, without events of any kind. Magdalen dreamed away the hours over a book. A weary patience of expectation was all she felt now—the poignant torment of thought was dulled and blunted at last. She passed the day and the evening in the parlour, vaguely conscious of a strange feeling of aversion to going back to her own room. As the night advanced, as the noises ceased in-doors and out, her restlessness began to return. She endeavoured to quiet herself by reading. Books failed to fix her attention. The newspaper was lying in a corner of the room : she tried the newspaper next.

She looked mechanically at the headings of the articles ; she listlessly turned over page after page, until her wandering attention was arrested by the narrative of an Execution in a distant part of England. There was nothing to strike her in the story of the crime ; and yet she read it. It was a common, horribly common, act of bloodshed—the murder of a woman in farm-service, by a man in the same employment who was jealous of her. He had been convicted on no extraordinary evidence ; he had been hanged under no unusual circumstances. He had made his confession, when he knew there was no hope for him, like other criminals of his class ; and the newspaper had printed it at the end of the article, in these terms :—

I kept company with the deceased for a year or thereabouts. I said I would marry her when I had money enough. She said I had money enough now. We had a quarrel. She refused to walk out with me any more ; she wouldn't draw me my beer ; she took up with my fellow-servant, David Crouch. I went to her on the Saturday, and said I would marry her as soon as we could be asked in church, if she would give up Crouch. She laughed at me. She turned me out of the washhouse, and the rest of them saw her turn me out. I was not easy in my mind. I went and sat on a gate—the gate in the meadow they call Pettit's Piece. I thought I would shoot her. I went and fetched my gun and loaded it. I went out into Pettit's Piece again. I was hard put to it, to make up my mind. I thought I would try my luck—I mean try whether to kill her or not—by throwing up the Spud of the plough into the air. I said to myself, if it falls flat, I'll spare her ; if it falls point in the earth, I'll kill her. I took a good swing with it, and shied it up. It fell point in the earth. I went and shot her. It was a bad job, but I did it. I did it, as they said I did it at the trial. I hope the Lord will have mercy on me. I wish my mother to have my old clothes. I have no more to say.

In the happier days of her life, Magdalen would have passed over the narrative of the execution, and the printed confession which accompanied it, unread—the subject would have failed

to attract her. She read the horrible story now—read it, with an interest unintelligible to herself. Her attention, which had wandered over higher and better things, followed every sentence of the murderer's hideously direct confession, from beginning to end. If the man, or the woman, had been known to her—if the place had been familiar to her memory—she could hardly have followed the narrative more closely, or have felt a more distinct impression of it left on her mind. She laid down the paper, wondering at herself ; she took it up once more, and tried to read some other portion of the contents. The effort was useless ; her attention wandered again. She threw the paper away ; and went out into the garden. The night was dark ; the stars were few and faint. She could just see the gravel walk—she could just pace it backwards and forwards between the house-door and the gate.

The confession in the newspaper had taken a fearful hold on her mind. As she paced the walk, the black night opened over the sea, and showed her the murderer in the field, hurling the Spud of the plough into the air. She ran, shuddering, back to the house. The murderer followed her into the parlour. She seized the candle, and went up into her room. The vision of her own distempered fancy followed her to the place where the laudanum was hidden—and vanished there.

It was midnight ; and there was no sign yet of the captain's return.

She took from the writing-case the long letter which she had written to Norah, and slowly read it through. The letter quieted her. When she reached the blank space left at the end, she hurriedly turned back, and began it over again.

One o'clock struck from the church clock ; and still the captain never appeared.

She read the letter for the second time ; she turned back obstinately, despairingly ; and began it for the third time. As she once more reached the last page, she looked at her watch. It was a quarter to two. She had just put the watch back in the belt of her dress, when there came to her—far off in the stillness of the morning—a sound of wheels.

She dropped the letter, and clasped her cold hands in her lap, and listened. The sound came on, faster and faster, nearer and nearer—the trivial sound to all other ears ; the sound of Doom to hers. It passed the side of the house ; it travelled a little further on ; it stopped. She heard a loud knocking—then the opening of a window—then voices—then a long silence—then the wheels again, coming back—then the opening of the door below, and the sound of the captain's voice in the passage.

She could endure it no longer. She opened her door a little way, and called to him.

He ran up-stairs instantly, astonished that she was not in bed. She spoke to him through the narrow opening of the door ; keeping herself hidden behind it, for she was afraid to let him see her face.

"Has anything gone wrong?" she asked.

"Make your mind easy," he answered. "Nothing has gone wrong."

"Is no accident likely to happen between this and Monday?"

"None whatever. The marriage is a certainty."

"A certainty?"

"Yes."

"Good night."

She put her hand out through the door. He took it with some little surprise: it was not often in his experience that she gave him her hand of her own accord.

"You have sat up too long," he said, as he felt the clasp of her cold fingers. "I am afraid you will have a bad night—I'm afraid you will not sleep."

She softly closed the door.

"I shall sleep," she said, "sounder than you think for."

It was past two o'clock when she shut herself up alone in her room. Her chair stood in its customary place by the toilette-table. She sat down for a few minutes thoughtfully—then opened her letter to Norah, and turned to the end, where the blank space was left. The last lines written above the space ran thus: . . . "I have laid my whole heart bare to you; I have hidden nothing. It has come to this. The end I have toiled for, at such terrible cost to myself, is an end which I must reach, or die. It is wickedness, madness, what you will—but it is so. There are now two journeys before me to choose between. If I can marry him—the journey to the church. If the profanation of myself is more than I can bear—the journey to the grave!"

Under that last sentence, she wrote these lines:—

"My choice is made. If the cruel law will let you, lay me with my father and mother, in the churchyard at home. Farewell, my love! Be always innocent; be always happy. If Frank ever asks about me, say I died forgiving him. Don't grieve long for me, Norah—I am not worth it."

She sealed the letter, and addressed it to her sister. The tears gathered in her eyes as she laid it on the table. She waited until her sight was clear again, and then took the bank-notes once more from the little bag in her bosom. After wrapping them in a sheet of note-paper, she wrote Captain Wragge's name on the enclosure, and added these words below it: "Lock the door of my room, and leave me till my sister comes. The money I promised you is in this. You are not to blame; it is my fault, and mine only. If you have any friendly remembrance of me, be kind to your wife for my sake."

After placing the enclosure by the letter to Norah, she rose and looked round the room. Some few little things in it were not in their places. She set them in order, and drew the curtains on either side, at the head of her bed. Her own dress was the next object of her scrutiny.

It was all as neat, as pure, as prettily arranged as ever. Nothing about her was disordered, but her hair. Some tresses had fallen loose on one side of her head; she carefully put them back in their places, with the help of her glass. "How pale I look!" she thought, with a faint smile. "Shall I be paler still, when they find me in the morning?"

She went straight to the place where the laudanum was hidden, and took it out. The bottle was so small, that it lay easily in the palm of her hand. She let it remain there for a little while, and stood looking at it.

"DEATH!" she said. "In this drop of brown drink—DEATH!"

As the words passed her lips, an agony of unutterable horror seized on her in an instant. She crossed the room unsteadily, with a maddening confusion in her head, with a suffocating anguish at her heart. She caught at the table to support herself. The faint clink of the bottle, as it fell harmlessly from her loosened grasp, and rolled against some porcelain object on the table, struck through her brain like the stroke of a knife. The sound of her own voice, sunk to a whisper—her voice only uttering that one word, Death—rushed in her ears like the rushing of a wind. She dragged herself to the bedside, and rested her head against it, sitting on the floor. "Oh, my life! my life!" she thought; "what is my life worth, that it cling to it like this?"

An interval passed, and she felt her strength returning. She raised herself on her knees, and hid her face on the bed. She tried to pray—to pray to be forgiven for seeking the refuge of death. Frantic words burst from her lips—words which would have risen to cries, if she had not stifled them in the bedclothes. She started to her feet; despair strengthened her with a headlong fury against herself. In one moment, she was back at the table; in another, the poison was once more in her hand.

She removed the cork, and lifted the bottle to her mouth.

At the first cold touch of the glass on her lips, her strong young life leapt up in her leaping blood, and fought with the whole frenzy of its loathing against the close terror of Death. Every active power in the exuberant vital force that was in her, rose in revolt against the destruction which her own will would fain have wreaked on her own life. She paused: for the second time, she paused in spite of herself. There, in the glorious perfection of her youth and health—there, trembling on the verge of human existence, she stood; with the kiss of the Destroyer close at her lips, and Nature, faithful to its sacred trust, fighting for the salvation of her to the last.

No word passed her lips. Her cheeks flushed deep; her breath came thick and fast. With the poison still in her hand, with the sense that she might faint in another moment, she made for the window, and threw back the curtain that covered it.

The new day had risen. The broad grey dawn flowed in on her, over the quiet eastern sea.

She saw the waters, heaving large and silent in the misty calm ; she felt the fresh breath of the morning flutter cool on her face. Her strength returned ; her mind cleared a little. At the sight of the sea, her memory recalled the walk in the garden, overnight, and the picture which her dis-tempered fancy had painted on the black void. In thought, she saw the picture again—the murderer hurling the Spud of the plough into the air, and setting the life or death of the woman who had deserted him, on the hazard of the falling point. The infection of that terrible superstition seized on her mind, as suddenly as the new day had burst on her view. The promise of release which she saw in it from the horror of her own hesitation, roused the last energies of her despair. She resolved to end the struggle, by setting her life or death on the hazard of a chance.

On what chance ?

The sea showed it to her. Dimly distinguishable through the mist, she saw a little fleet of coasting vessels slowly drifting towards the house, all following the same direction with the favouring set of the tide. In half an hour—perhaps in less—the fleet would have passed her window. The hands of her watch pointed to four o'clock. She seated herself close at the side of the window, with her back towards the quarter from which the vessels were drifting down on her—with the poison placed on the window-sill, and the watch on her lap. For one half hour to come, she determined to wait there, and count the vessels as they went by. If, in that time, an even number passed her—the sign given, should be a sign to live. If the uneven number prevailed—the end should be Death.

With that final resolution, she rested her head against the window, and waited for the ships to pass.

The first came; high, dark, and near in the mist ; gliding silently over the silent sea. An interval—and the second followed, with the third close after it. Another interval, longer and longer drawn out—and nothing passed. She looked at her watch. Twelve minutes ; and three ships. Three.

The fourth came ; slower than the rest, larger than the rest, farther off in the mist than the rest. The interval followed ; a long interval once more. Then the next vessel passed ; darkest and nearest of all. Five. The next uneven number—Five.

She looked at her watch again. Nineteen minutes ; and five ships. Twenty minutes. Twenty-one, two, three—and no sixth vessel. Twenty-four ; and the sixth came by. Twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight ; and the next uneven number—the fatal Seven—glided into view. Two minutes to the end of the half-hour. And seven ships.

Twenty-nine ; and nothing followed in the wake of the seventh ship. The minute-hand of the watch moved on half way to thirty—and still

the white heaving sea was a misty blank. Without moving her head from the window, she took the poison in one hand, and raised the watch in the other. As the quick seconds counted each other out, her eyes, as quick as they, looked from the watch to the sea, from the sea to the watch—looked for the last time at the sea—and saw the EIGHTH ship.

Life ! At the last moment, Life !

She never moved ; she never spoke. The death of thought, the death of feeling, seemed to have come to her already. She put back the poison mechanically on the ledge of the window ; and watched, as in a dream, the ship gliding smoothly on its silent way—gliding till it melted dimly into shadow—gliding till it was lost in the mist.

The strain on her mind relaxed, when the Messenger of Life had passed from her sight.

" Providence ?" she whispered faintly to herself. " Or Chance ?"

Her eyes closed, and her head fell back. When the sense of life returned to her, the morning sun was warm on her face—the blue heaven looked down on her—and the sea was a sea of gold.

She fell on her knees at the window, and burst into tears.

Towards noon that day, the captain, waiting below stairs, and hearing no movement in Magdalen's room, felt uneasy at the long silence. He desired the new maid to follow him up-stairs ; and, pointing to the door, told her to go in softly, and see whether her mistress was awake.

The maid entered the room ; remained there a moment ; and came out again, closing the door gently.

" She looks beautiful, sir," said the girl ; " and she's sleeping as quietly as a new-born child."

VICTORIA'S IRONSIDES.

THERE is a good deal of discussion in extremes, about British defences. We say nothing of the outrageous fortification scheme, the armament of Portsdown Hill, the forts upon the sandy flats of the Horse and Noman at Spithead, or the building down into the sea at Plymouth. But we look to the ships. The famous iron-clad *Warrior* is certainly a shade better than the *Gloire*, though she *does* roll in the trough of the sea to an angle of forty-five degrees, and though she *is* apt to obey her helm in a way that would shock any well-bred wooden sailing-frigate. Shot and shell are said now to have been developed into something so tremendous, that a new gun or mortar is thought to be as dangerous to wooden ships, as a tin of never-mind-who's paste is to blackbeetles. " Wooden fleets, however numerous, destroyed in one night by the use of Wiggins's patent gun," is now the formula that is to whiten the cheeks of British admirals, and make us all feel like a nest of ants into whose hill a pig's snout

has been thrust; that is to say, possessed with a wild activity for the repair of damage. Upon all such matters there is never a touch of craven alarm in English panic, though we couple the alarmist with the panic-monger. Our alarm is in the old military sense of the word, when "Sound the alarm!" was the word to the trumpeter, who, by a breath, turned rest into action, and made of ten thousand men one man having the power of ten thousand. No doubt it is true that we are wise in delivering our neighbours from temptation. The French people have an inconvenient regard for military glory, as a motive for, not an accident of war. They are now subject to a government that partly exists by giving evidence of military strength, that cannot keep its soldiers long inactive, and that, if England by too much neglect of armament should seem to many vain imaginations easy prey, might even, through false confidence, be tempted to destroy itself at our expense. Every man has two sides to his hand: on one side, a palm where-with to give and take in peace and friendship: on the other side, an armament of knuckles. Where the knuckles are weak, the grasp also of the palm is feeble. Let us arm, then, and with iron gauntlets to our fists if we see that our neighbours are providing themselves with them! But do not let us leave out of account, while we compare the artificial arms of each that are to be wielded, that even *their* power also has to come out of the natural arms that are to wield them. England has pluck and determination the most obstinate, the strongest natural arm in the world, and the best provided cupboard wherfrom to sustain its strength. There are men who can disarm the practised fencer with a broomstick. England could still do more than a little execution with her wooden fleet, which may be obsolete, but is not, therefore, useless.

It is only under certain conditions, at present rare, that wooden ships are over-matched by Merrimacs and Monitors and Warriors and Gloires. The Merrimac had to be blown up, the Monitor out at sea was a swimming shower-bath to the men shut up in her. The Gloire is a desperately bad sailer. Meanwhile, our numerous wooden ships glide over the sea, able to carry troops and arms to all corners of the earth, and their sides bristle with guns that are by no means out of date, since experiment continues to prove that at short range the shots of the old smooth-bored artillery are more effective than those of the best modern rifled gun, whose superiority lies altogether in their character as arms of precision at long range. The great blunder of some who make outcry, lies in their belief that new discoveries, which can be adopted only in course of time at immense cost, instantly supersede existing usages. Because a floating iron turtle has destroyed in harbour, several wooden ships that lay anchored and untrimmed within its reach, we are to assume that our whole existing navy, except in so far as it is iron-plated, may as well be sold by auction for old timber. We are building what Mr. Scott Russell calls "the

Fleet of the Future," but we are also using the Fleet of the Present. If we had to fight tomorrow, we could deliver some stout blows with that same Fleet of the Present. Mr. Scott Russell has written a very good pamphlet indeed, about the necessity of having iron ships; but the fallacy of argument in extremes, appears clearly enough in its very title: *The Fleet of the Future in 1862; or, England without a Fleet.* It would have been as true to say, when Caxton was about to set up his presses, *The Books of the Future in 1462; or, England without Books.* Prospero's wand still lies at the bottom of the sea, and the naval engineers of no country in the world have fished it up.

Mr. Scott Russell complains that the Admiralty did not begin soon enough to make its iron ships. If not, so far as regards the comparison between nations, it is making up for lost time. Making and made, we are at the beginning of our third dozen. But the House of Commons, Mr. Russell thinks, should take the matter into its own hands. "At one and the same time," he tells us, "all these things want reconstruction; first, the Admiralty and its departments; secondly, the navy and its classes; thirdly, marine artillery, its ammunition, and the mechanism to work it; fourthly, naval tactics, techniques, and warfare; fifthly, the dockyards, their functions and organisation." Happily for us, man is man all the world over, and those people only die the sooner, who attempt to get through more than a life's work in a lifetime. But then we have this home-thrust. The use of iron ships and the weakness of our wooden ships was known, says Mr. Scott Russell, seven years ago. If we had begun then to build Warriors, and had spent on them all the money that was applicable to the maintenance of the fleet afloat, we could have had by this time twenty Warriors in the Channel, twenty in the Mediterranean, and twenty in the West Indies—ships without men. The navy estimates Mr. Russell divides in even halves between the fleet afloat and the dockyards, with the work done in them, and the whole of the sum paid for maintenance of the fleet afloat might, he says, have been spent in building sixty Warriors, stopping meanwhile the maintenance of the existing wooden fleet and the pay of the men. Fifty years ago the navy estimates for this country were a million and a half. In the year before the Crimean war they were six millions and a quarter, and the vote was for a personnel of thirty-nine thousand men. The Crimean war raised the navy estimates to sixteen millions and a quarter, and at its close they were cut down again by one half. The estimates have risen again since then. But while much of the additional money has been spent on ship-building, plating and Warrior-making, some has gone to improvement of the seaman's condition.

But a great deal has gone to the dockyards, and here Mr. Scott Russell raises the large question whether it is worth the country's while to be its own manufacturer, and pay the cost of

large establishments, in which jobbery abounds, and men do not work as they must under an employer whose success in life depends upon his seeing that they all perform their duty. Government buys its guns, and goes to market for its engines; it has gone to market even for its iron ships; and whatever may have been the case years ago, before the immense recent development of British manufacturing enterprise, there now is no difficulty in getting anything made that can be paid for, and in getting it well made at the fairest price of good work and material, by the use of a little ordinary care and skilled attention. A large part of our existing dockyard machinery is an arrangement of offices and salaries for getting done, in the costliest and most ineffective way, what could be done perfectly well and without waste, by simple purchase of the articles required: whether ships or ship's biscuits. No doubt there are now associated with the dockyards, large staffs of men whose salaries are their lives, and whose salaries ought not to be taken from them. But the principle of reliance upon the free competing energies of trade having been once largely admitted by the Admiralty, with time and tact and a humane exercise of reason the gradual passage might be made out of a half faith in one system into a full reliance on the other. A few book-keepers and accountants, with some shrewd, practical surveyors to inspect the work of contractors and report to the surveyor general, would be quite staff enough for the ship-building department of the Admiralty civil service; and the money taken from the maintenance of many men in a state of half torpid attention to routine, would then be spent to advantage on the large development of that independent energy which is itself the first in rank of the defences of the country.

It is against the immense waste to the country involved in the dockyard establishments that the famous ship-builder—who no longer builds, and, therefore, is not urged by direct interest for a particular shop of his own—hits home. It was thought to be cheap to convert ships. A fleet of sailing-vessels was, in fact, converted by the Admiralty into a fleet of steamers by cutting across or letting a new piece into the middle, to admit the engines, altering the stern to fit the screw, and lengthening the bow. Returns were made of cost of labour and material, and of buying engines. All seemed clear. But the expense of the establishment that was to see all this done, never appeared in the estimate. In twenty years, forty large ships and frigates were converted into steamers; forty more were built. But, including in their expense that of the establishment that exists only to produce them, they cost fifty millions. The same money would have bought, new from the ship-builders, a fleet of two hundred first-class steam-frigates. The iron ship-builders of the present, with the resources now at their command, can, says Mr. Scott Russell, produce, in a couple of years, twelve Warriors, and go on supplying us with one every two months: four in the two years being built by four firms on the Thames: three on the

Mersey: three on the Clyde: one on the Tyne: and one on the Severn. The Admiralty failed, he says, with its contractors, by accepting from inexperienced men tenders for work done at an impossible price in impossible time. The tender system requires always the check of discretion and skill in the person who receives tenders. The skilled subordinates of the Admiralty knew, says Mr. Scott Russell, that a ship of the Warrior class cannot be completed within less than twenty-four months, and that its fair price is fifty pounds a ton. They knew also, who were the skilled and competent builders. But in making the contracts for iron ships which should be now ready and are not ready, this knowledge, Mr. Scott Russell asserts, was not used. Promise of early possession of an iron fleet was made, he says, upon the faith of inexperienced contractors, whose error, jumping with the public wish, it was convenient to encourage.

In the opinion of Mr. Russell, the originator of the idea that ships-of-war might be put into iron armour was Mr. R. L. Stevens, American engineer and ship-builder, who fourteen years ago had found by experiment that six inches thick of plates of iron bolted to the outside of a wooden ship, formed a perfect protection against the heaviest artillery then in use. The experiments were carried on by the American government. But the first to carry this idea into practical effect was the French emperor, who himself designed the shot-proof floating battery Avalanche, brought with success in 'fifty-five against the land batteries of Kinburn. Of that floating battery the armour was not, according to Mr. Stevens's plan, composed of six plates each an inch thick, but of one solid four-inch plate, as suggested by Mr. Thomas Lloyd, of the Admiralty. It is now being asserted in America that the series of inch plates has proved itself a better defence than the single solid plate. It was found also at Sebastopol that a wooden ship could not stand the horizontal fire of shells between its decks. After the Crimean war the French emperor, says Mr. Russell, at once resolved to finish the timber ships then in hand, but otherwise to spend his annual ship-building money upon iron vessels. Since that time, we are told, he has spent twenty millions for ships: we thirty. But he has spent his money upon iron, with one exception in favour of wood; we upon wood, with one exception in favour of iron. In fact, "conversion" is as much practised in France as in England.

Mr. Scott Russell believes in large iron ships, and is angry with the Admiralty for having shown a determined wish to get the principle of the Warrior applied to vessels of half its size: so causing to be built, the Defence and Resistance, Hector and Valiant. Indeed, we began in 'fifty-six with the iron-clad floating battery Erebus, of sixteen guns, and not quite a third the burthen of the Warrior. The country, last year, voted money for six more ships of the Warrior class, and we are, on the whole, so far advanced, that England has two dozen to France's

three dozen of iron ships building and built : including the Black Prince, the Northumberland, and the Minotaur, of fifty guns. It is probable that no armament of ships will make a sailor of the Frenchman, and the Frenchman must turn sailor in earnest before France can become, what she aspires to be, a mighty naval power. But it is quite true that, since the Crimean war, the reconstruction of the French fleet has been arranged with the steadiest determination. In the year 'fifty-seven the grand project was adopted, to reconstitute, not in seven years but in the fourteen years (from 'fifty-eight to 'seventy-two) the whole French navy. First, there was to be a transition fleet formed by giving auxiliary screws to all line-of-battle ships that were not too old ; secondly, there were to be built and armed, a hundred and fifty rapid steamers of different sizes and the best attainable models ; thirdly, there was to be formed a transport fleet of seventy-two ships, partly new, partly of sailing-frigates converted into steam-transports. To carry out this scheme, the budget of the Marine Department is augmented by seventeen millions of francs a year during the fourteen years, and the whole yearly cost of the French navy is raised to about five millions sterling. During the last two years, expeditions to Syria, China, Cochin-China, and Mexico, have raised the annual cost of the French navy, in English pounds sterling, to more than six millions and a half. This activity, at a time when great changes are being established in the character and armament of ships, compels increased expenditure in England, while the fact that several of the questions touching the construction, size, &c., of the iron ships of the future are by no means so completely settled as is supposed by Mr. Scott Russell ; who simply asks for a new monster Warrior every two months. This causes in England some little rational unwillingness to build too fast.

As to many of these matters, Mr. Scott Russell writes, no doubt, in extremes. Much that he says may be fairly contested ; but to nothing which he says can be denied grave and earnest consideration, as emanating from an honest and thorough Expert. He is unquestionably right in urging that, as we are, indeed, now forced to look to private contractors for iron-ships and for guns, so we might, with very great advantage, work in the direction of a reduction of dockyard establishments, and—in the present state of English trade and resources—find it much cheaper to go to market for ships and for all that belongs to them, than, by means of a large costly and clumsy official machinery, attempt to be our own ship-builders. Whenever government attempts to supersede private enterprise, either legislatively or competitively, it fails. Its aim should be to obtain a thoroughly competent staff of surveyors—skilled “buyers,” in fact, who know what their employer wants, and who are expert enough to see that he is not cheated. It was this kind of deficiency which caused certain dishonest manufacturers to flourish during the Crimean war, and which

disgraced the nation in the Eyes of Europe—accustomed to look upon it as a practical community.

BURIED ALIVE.

AMONG those who studied under the same professor with me at Brunswick, was a Prussian, who made me promise that if ever I visited Prussia I would spend a few days at his father's house—a promise I kept last spring, the long evenings of which were partly passed in reading. On one particular night my friend's father asked his son if he had not translated into English some remarkable instances of individuals being buried alive ? On the latter replying in the affirmative, he asked him to read some of them, that I might give an opinion of the manner in which he had written them into my native language. After a little pressing, Ludwig said :

“ The first I will read, then, shall be that entitled, ‘ Of the miner Karoly Varga, who for twelve days was buried beneath salt.’ The story, as he tells it, is as follows :

“ My name is Karoly Varga. I worked in the salt mines, as my father and brother do, and as my grandfather did, and his father before him. On the 17th August, 1723, I dressed myself as usual, and descended into the mine, taking with me a box of candles, which were to be used for a purpose I shall mention presently. My orders were to make a careful examination of the arches that had been erected, and the blocks that had been placed round the pools of water to prevent the expected visitors from falling in, for it was intended to give a concert and entertainment in honour of the director of the mine and his wife, who would complete twenty-five years of married life on the twenty-fifth day of the month mentioned. I had also to select a place in which to establish the orchestra, of which I was myself one of the members, the rest having deputed me to make this choice in consequence of my experience in working the mine, care being always requisite in choosing the position, from the danger of the vibration causing a fall. Having performed the first part of my duty, I climbed up into a gallery, which had been cut long before the mine had reached its present depth, to select the position in which the orchestra was to establish itself. The spot that seemed most suitable was a recess, lofty at the entrance, but of no great depth. Its shape was so good for the purpose, that I fetched the box of candles and put it in the recess ready for use. It was not till I had done this that it occurred to me to sound my horn and try the effect produced. I blew it first at the entrance, then drew back farther and farther, sounding it at intervals, knowing there were others in the mine who would be able to tell me what the effect was in that part where the company would be assembled. I was standing at the very bottom of the cave, and was in the act of drawing a deep breath to sound a final blast, when I was stopped by a patterning sound which paralysed me, and before I was myself again, there was a fall of earth and

salt, lumps of which rolled to my feet. I had a lighted torch beside me, and with this I examined the fall to see if there was any opening for escape, but there was none, the recess being blocked up to the roof. I thought I might call the attention of my fellow-miners to my position by blowing my horn, but the only result of my doing so was to cause another fall. I laid it down to think over my position, and calculate my chance of escape. I hoped that, as they would be certain to miss me within a few hours, there might be something in the slip to attract their attention. Hour after hour passed over without my hearing a sound except that caused by the earth crumbling down as it settled into a firmer mass. The torch I had extinguished long since, to save myself from being suffocated by the smoke, and instead of it I had lighted a candle, but this melted away in a few minutes owing to the air being so hot. I was now in total darkness. The air was filled with particles of salt, which stung my eyes and made the inside of my mouth, and nose, and my throat, smart painfully, besides exciting a sensation of intense thirst. As for hunger, it was long before I felt it, and when I did I had a ready means at hand of assuaging it, in the box of tallow, which, disgusting as it would have been at any other time, was a treasure to me now. There was another comforting circumstance, that air made its way to the little hollow in which I was confined; where from I could not tell, but it was sufficient in quantity to prevent me from being suffocated, though breathing was a matter of great difficulty and pain. I soon began to feel sleepy, and stretched myself on the ground, but whether I slept only a few minutes or several hours I have no idea; and so the early part of my imprisonment passed away.

"All this time nothing had occurred to show that anybody had discovered the place where I was buried, though I was sure I must have been missed long since. Then, for the first time, I was seized with a hopeless dread. I became intensely cold, my heart almost ceased to beat, and my tongue and the roof of my mouth became dry and hard, as if it had been burnt with a red-hot iron. I curled myself in a heap on the ground, and for a time was insensible. When I again grew conscious, my sufferings were much aggravated. A burning heat was gnawing at my body from head to foot. The feeling is indescribable, and cannot be imagined. I knew that the salt was getting into my blood, and that I must soon go raving mad if I could not keep it out of my lungs. I ate as much of the tallow as I could, or rather I put it in my mouth and let it run down my throat. This relieved me very much, and I then tore a piece off my dress and fastened it across my mouth and nose, which added to the difficulty of breathing, but kept the larger particles of salt from entering my lungs. I also found that the air was better when I was standing than when I was lying down, and from thenceforth I stood with my back resting against the side of the cave, as much as my strength allowed me. Before this

I had tried to remove the earth nearest the roof, but I could find nothing to encourage me to persevere, and the exertion was so painful, and the clouds of salt dust raised were so thick, notwithstanding that I placed every handful I took out carefully at the bottom of the heap, that I desisted, thinking it better to bear my sufferings as patiently as I could till my situation was discovered, than to render it worse by vain efforts to escape from it. But as they continued to increase I determined to make another attempt, whatever the consequence might be. I groped about till I found the hole I had made, and began to rake out the earth with my hands, but with less precaution than before, for I had now become desperate, and would gladly have died to have been released from my misery. The salt forced itself through the cloth over my face, penetrated to my lungs, and caused me such torture as no words can describe. I dashed myself against the sides of my prison, I beat my head against the rock, but I was unconscious of pain from so doing; life seemed raging within me with greater strength and intensity than I had ever felt before, and it seemed to me that I could move a mountain by my own strength alone. I thrust my head and shoulders into the hole I had made, and tried to burrow my way through like a mole, and when I could endure this no longer, I threw myself on the ground and rolled and writhed. In imagination I screamed and cried, but in truth I could utter no sound. I prayed, oh! how fervently I prayed, for death, but it would not come. Then I swallowed some of my provisions, and this gave me relief for a time, but only for a time, for the same tortures began again very soon, followed by a repetition of my frantic attempts at self-destruction. If I could have abstained from the only thing that gave me relief, my torments must soon have been at an end; but the very intensity of my pain forced me, against my will, to resort to it. Thus my sufferings went on ebbing and flowing, but like the rising tide, always mounting.

"I was in this dreadful condition, when I heard the sound of music. At first I thought it must be my imagination, that I was at last going mad. Then, as it continued, I remembered the concert in honour of the director. I searched about for my horn, and when the music was silent, I raised it to my lips and tried to sound it, I might as well have attempted to rend the rock asunder which cut me off from the light; my dry and cracked lips would not fit themselves to the instrument, and the little air my lungs were still capable of expelling wasted itself soundlessly. In my madness I beat it furiously against the ground, I bit and gnawed it, and, finally, I dashed it down, and seizing handfuls of the dirt, I thrust it into my mouth in vain efforts to choke myself. Again and again the music was renewed, but at last it ceased altogether, and I knew that I was once more alone in the mine.

"I afterwards learnt that, during the concert, one of the miners in wandering through the old workings, noticed a mark on the rock where I

had cleared the head of the torch. The freshness of this mark drew his attention to the fall of earth, and though he was not able to distinguish whether this fall was of recent or old date, he pointed it out to others, and they determined to clear it away, that my body, if it were beneath it, might receive Christian burial. The next day the director gave them a fête in return for their entertainment, and the following day being Sunday, it was not till the succeeding day they began digging for me, which was the twelfth day of my imprisonment. On that evening I was released and carried out of the mine.

" My appearance at this time was frightful. Every hair had fallen from me, my eyes had disappeared, and my body, from head to foot, was covered with crystals of salt. I was laid in warm water and kept there : warm and cold water was given me to drink as often as I could swallow it, and my sufferings soon began to diminish. In time they became endurable, but they have never left me altogether, and I shall always be a poor, blind, suffering creature such as I am now."

The next case had something of the supernatural in it. "The narrative of Thomas Whitmead and Joseph Anscombe, who, with Henry Aldham, were buried in a chalk-pit on the 16th April, 1802 ; and of the apparition of the latter to above nine persons at one time after his death."

" These three persons lived at Stratford, in the county of Wiltshire, in England, and worked a chalk-pit on Salisbury Plain for their joint benefit. This so-called pit was in the form of a crescent, the excavation having been begun at the foot of a large mound, so that the entrance should be on a level with the adjoining plain. After the excavation had been carried on for some time, they cut out a chamber in the chalk for the purpose of shelter in storms, and for holding tools, wheelbarrows, and other things. On the 16th of April a terrific storm arose, the wind blowing with peculiar violence on this plain owing to its great extent and the few obstacles which exist there to impede its progress. The rain fell in torrents, and the flashes of lightning succeeded each other so rapidly that the air seemed all-a-blaze. The three men sat down in their nook to wait till the storm had passed over. Whitmead and Anscombe struck light and began smoking, but Aldham, who was a man of an unusually serious turn of mind, and much given to the study of religious subjects, sat down a little within the entrance, just out of reach of the driving rain, and began reading the Pilgrim's Progress, the numbers of which were left at the pit by a book-hawker who crossed the plain at regular intervals during the year. Being asked by his partners to read aloud, he commenced with the account of Christian's journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The exciting character of the narrative, combined with the awe inspired by the raging storm, caused the other two to listen with such breathless interest that their pipes were forgotten and the

light died out. Just as Aldham was reading the passage—'The flames would be reaching towards him ; also, he heard doleful voices and rushings to and fro, so that sometimes he thought he should be torn in pieces, or trodden down like mire in the streets. This frightful sight was seen, and these dreadful noises were heard by him for several miles together ; and coming to a place where he thought he heard a company of fiends coming forward to meet him, he stopped and began to muse what he had best to do—a more furious blast came, the howling and roaring of which drowned the reader's voice, and almost overpowered the sound of the falling of a large fir-tree, several of which grew within a few paces of the top of the cave. This tree fell over the entrance, and its matted roots tore up a large portion of the earth which formed the roof of the cavern, and to this circumstance the two men were probably indebted for their escape from instant suffocation from the consequence of what followed almost immediately afterwards. They were still trembling from the fright when the lightning [thunderbolt in narrative] descended upon the fallen tree, tearing it into fragments, and from thence passed into the earth, rending it, and causing the chalk to fall into the cavern where they had sheltered themselves, and burying them therein. Anscombe and Whitmead being at the bottom of the excavation, happened to be under that part of the surface from which the earth had been torn up by the roots of the tree, and were able to breathe with tolerable facility, though unable to extricate themselves from the mass of chalk which surrounded them ; their position being still further aggravated by the rain which, continuing to pour without slackening for some time, trickled through the mass and streamed down their faces, and saturated them to the skin. After a night passed in this position, during which they could hear the groans of their unfortunate companion, they were rescued by their fellow-villagers, without other injuries than a few bruises of no importance. As for poor Aldham, his case was much worse. Having been seated near the entrance of the cave, under the roof from which no portion of the earth had been removed, he had been completely buried in the chalk, the pressure being to some extent increased by the body of the tree. To the circumstance that chalk fractures in pieces and not in powder it was owing that he was dug out alive ; had it been earth he must have been stifled. Though, however, he was yet alive when he was placed on hurdle and carried to his cottage, he had received such severe internal injuries that the doctor, who had been sent for in anticipation, after a very brief examination, pronounced his case hopeless. Still, he lingered on day after day, with the shadow of the hand of death on his face and the point of his dart pressing against his breast. Meanwhile, his partners had recovered their health and strength and were able to work again.

" I have now to relate a very extraordinary occurrence which forms part of this painful his-

tory. The three men whose names I have mentioned, with ten others, formed a club, which combined for numerous beneficial purposes. Their meetings were held on a certain evening every week, in a little house in a garden belonging to a maltster, who was one of the members of the club. The entrance to this garden was through his house, or through a door opening into the fields, of which each member had a key. On the fifth evening after the accident they were assembled as usual. Some of them were smoking, and had jugs of beer before them, but all were unusually grave and silent, for Whitmead and Ancombe, who were present, had called on their suffering partner on their way down, and found him speechless and at the point of death. While they were sitting thus, expecting every instant to hear the passing-bell tell of his soul's departure, the figure of their friend, with no clothing except a shirt upon him, appeared in the room. It looked about for an instant, and then sat down in a vacant chair near the door. Not doubting that it was the apparition of their friend, and not a being of flesh and blood, no one dared to speak. The figure sat still for some minutes without speaking, quite regardless of everything around, then repeating in a low monotonous tone, 'He hath turned the shadow of death into the morning,' it rose, glided noiselessly from the room, and disappeared through the door opening into the fields. It is not known, nor is it possible to form an idea with any certainty, how many minutes elapsed before any of those present had so far recovered their self-possession as to open the door and look out; but when they did, the figure was not visible, though they could see for some distance along the path leading in the direction of Aldham's house. After exchanging a few remarks, Whitmead, Ancombe and another, named Jennings, agreed to go to their friend's house and ascertain his condition; but before they returned the tolling of the church bell informed those who remained behind, that Aldham had ceased to exist. The information which the three brought back, was, that Aldham had died at twenty minutes past six o'clock; upon which one of the party averred that this was the very time when the figure entered the room, as he had his watch in his hand at the moment for the purpose of showing his neighbour the time; an assertion which his neighbour confirmed."

"And is that all the information the author gives?" asked I.

"That is all," replied Ludwig.

"Then," said I, "I think I can add something which detracts from the marvellous character of the narrative, though I cannot for the life of me remember where I read it, or heard it. The explanation is this, though it was not given till years afterwards: The nurse in whose charge he was, had received the strictest injunctions not to leave him alone for an instant, but instead of obeying her orders, she left the room for some purpose, and when she returned she found he had left the house. Being alone

in the cottage, there was nobody to know of this but herself, and before she had decided on what to do, and was looking up and down wondering in which direction to seek him, she saw him approaching from a coppice not far off, through which a footpath ran in the direction of the garden mentioned. He walked quietly in-doors, stretched himself on his bed, and drew his last breath. Fearing lest he might have been seen, and her character as a nurse consequently lost, she ran down to the sexton, who lived in a cottage close to the church, and without the loss of a minute he sounded the knell that had fallen so solemnly on the ears of the dead man's friends. The woman hastened back to the cottage and arrived before Whitmead and the others reached it, and on their asking what time Aldham had died, she told them at twenty minutes past six o'clock. It is possible that this explanation was not given till some time afterwards, the German may never have heard it."

After some remarks had been exchanged with reference to the simplicity with which this, one of the best authenticated ghost stories, had been explained, the translator proceeded to read another, entitled, "The narrative of Jacob Hirzig, a Jew, who was buried alive in a poisoned well."

"In the year 5108, which in the European calendar is 1348, a Jewish physician named Balavignus, who dwelt at Thonon, near Chillon, not having the fear of the Most Holy One before his eyes, did, under the influence of torture, he having been racked several times, and being, moreover, threatened with other and more grievous torments, confess that he had received from Rabbi Jacob Hirzig, through the hands of a Jewish boy, a packet of poison, which he was directed to throw into the principal wells of the town in which he lived, which injunction he had obeyed. This pretended confession, which he made in the madness caused by intense suffering, was afterwards read over to him, and he was made to swear to its truth on the Law. Subsequently, while still insane, he confessed, or was said to have confessed, that he had thrown a portion of the poison into a certain well, and that he had concealed another portion tied up in a piece of rag beneath the stones on the brink. Being taken to this well, and compelled to search among the stones, he, in the presence of the magistrate and other of the municipal authorities drew out a piece of rag, which on being opened was found to contain a red and black powder mingled together. The mob of Christians then present did thereupon seize a certain renegade Jew, who had departed from the religion of his forefathers, and forcing the magistrate to put a small quantity of the powder into a vessel, they filled it with water and compelled the Jew to swallow it; who was immediately smitten with death, and died in great agony within an hour—a most just punishment for his former apostacy. As for Balavignus he was taken back to prison, and subsequently put to death with great cruelty.

"On the day following the said discovery of the poison, in the evening, being the eve of the Sabbath, and my wife, Esther, having just kindled the lights, according to the custom of our people, the magistrate of the town of Chillon, attended by his officers, rode up to the door of my dwelling, dismounted, and entered therein. They first seized me, and then bound my arms together behind my back with great cruelty, so that the blood forced its way beneath my nails and dropped from the ends of my fingers to the ground. They next searched every corner of my house, trying by blows and threats to make my wife and daughter, Rebecca, reveal the secret hiding-place in which I kept my poisons. My heart was rent at the sight of the sufferings and indignities they were made to undergo, but I was powerless to help them, and I could only beseech them to bear patiently the trials to which they were subjected. After searching every part of my house, and finding nothing of what they were in search, I was dragged away to prison. The next day the magistrate and other officials came to me in my cell, and read to me the confession of Balavignus, concerning which they put to me many questions. I denied that I had sent any poison to him, or had ever thought of so doing, or that I had ever heard any of our people even speak of such a thing. Finding that I continued firm in my denial, and that I was prepared to swear on the Five Books of Moses that I knew nothing of any plot for poisoning the wells, I was ordered to be racked till I should be tortured into making confession of a falsehood. Four times were my limbs torn asunder by that hellish invention, till I could feel no longer, after which I was left for eleven days on the floor of my dungeon undisturbed. On the twelfth day I was taken from prison to the place of execution, to witness the murder of my countryman, Solomon Chomer, a man of wonderful knowledge, and greatly learned in the philosophy of the Egyptians and Chaldeans. He, too, had been sentenced to die for the same crime with which I was charged, and I was placed near him to be a witness of his sufferings. Together we called on the God of our forefathers for fortitude, and, verily, the patience with which he bore the cruel tortures to which he was subjected could only have been born of insensibility. He was stretched on a wheel, and after his arms and legs had been broken in sundry places by the bar of the executioner, he was unbound and laid on the ground, his body folded back on his legs so that his head rested on his heels. He was again questioned touching the crime with which he was charged, but he gave no answer; whereupon he was laid on the wood which had been prepared for the purpose, the fire was kindled, and his spirit rose with the smoke which ascended from the pile.

"I was being taken back to prison, my heart quaking with fear at the doom that was before me, when one cried 'Let us not suffer this Jew to escape us,' and another, 'Let us throw him in the well he poisoned for us.' Then there was

a great cry, and much tumult, and I was taken from the officers and dragged to a well outside the town in which the poison had been found, and hurled therein: the body of the apostate Jew, which had lain there unburied, being cast down upon me. The water reached above my shoulders when I stood upon my feet, and I was forced to stand on the tips of my toes to keep my mouth above water. Standing thus, with my flesh torn, bruised and bleeding, I heard the planks laid across the top of the well, and stones thrown on these, and then all was silent, and I was left to die an agonising death. After a while I felt that my feet were sinking deeper in the sand and gravel, and I had to cling to the sides of the well to keep myself from instant death.

"I had been in this position several hours when I heard a noise above me as though one were removing the stones, then a voice, which was that of my wife, Esther, calling my name. My heart leapt within me at the sound of her voice, and I answered joyfully, upon which she bade me be of good cheer. Presently she called again, and told me to tie the rope she was letting down about my body. I had much difficulty in doing this, because I was forced to loosen my hold and suffer myself to sink below the water till it forced itself beneath my eyelids. I succeeded at last in tying the cord tightly beneath my armpits, and was then drawn up to the well's mouth, and laid on the grass by my beloved wife and daughter. While I was slowly recovering the use of my limbs, which had been much weakened by the torments I had undergone, they occupied themselves in restoring the planks and stones to their places. When this had been done, we left the spot while it was yet dark, and I hid myself in a tree in a wood near my house, to which place Rebecca brought me food. Our escape from this country to Poland was accomplished with great difficulty and much suffering; for the deadly fear which filled men's minds on account of the fearful ravages of the Black Death, then raging all over the world, was turned into hate towards our nation, who were everywhere charged with causing the mortality by mixing poison in the wells and the sources of rivers."

SMALL-BEER CHRONICLES.

STILL dealing, as in the last of these Small-Beer Chronicles, on Deaths, I have to record the dissolution, not this time of any particular individual, but of an institution—a very old and respectable institution—now no more. It was called TRANSPORTATION. This antiquated system has gone the way of the door-knocker and the old-fashioned dinner, and is virtually dead.

Every year some of the difficulties connected with life increase. The remedies which used to apply to our social diseases either cease to act or are discarded as unsuited to the age we live in. What a simple and swiftly acting remedy we used to have for that worst of all social maladies, called crime! When that disease

broke out among us, the individual in whom it was exhibited used to be promptly seized and carried off to a certain Lazar House thousands of miles away, and well across the seas, where his noxious symptoms would not annoy the community, and where others would not be infected by him. Before this excellent and convenient plan had been hit upon, we had even a simpler way of dealing with these moral invalids. We used to kill them. It had been decided that a felon was a public nuisance, in the strongest sense of the word; that his reforming was too improbable a contingency to be worth a thought; that it was necessary to do something to him which should deter other people from following his example, and which would at the same time render it impossible for him to do any more mischief to his fellow-creatures. All this was effected (or supposed to be) in the most easy and complete manner possible by hanging him; and accordingly he was hanged. Besides: this remedy was so cheap. The hangman's fee was a mere nothing, especially when he knocked off a dozen or so of patients at one interview, and that fee once paid, and the shell provided by the prison carpenter, all was over, and a wretched failure of a creature, a disgrace to humanity, a plague to himself and to every one else, was got rid of.

There was only one unfortunate thing connected with this good old way of dealing with the criminal population; and that was, that it seemed an intolerable blot on our civilisation, and wholly inconsistent with humanity. It would not do. It was intolerable to think, as you got up any fine Monday morning to attend to your business or to enjoy yourself, that your fellow-men and women were being hanged by the neck before a brutal rabble, for robbing a hen-roost, or stealing a sheep. So gradually, and little by little, the gallows got to be out of fashion, and first one crime and then another was struck off the black list of capital offences. Still it was thought necessary to get rid of the criminal. So he and she were just despatched beyond seas to the other end of the world, and there kept according to the nature of their misdeeds, for seven years, for fourteen years, for a lifetime.

This system, in its turn, had great advantages. The horror of the gallows and its terrible weekly load was done away with, and still the criminals were got out of the way. They were sent to a place where none of us ever saw them, and where they could be forgotten. Reports in connexion with them would come out from time to time, but there is a great difference between reading about a convict, or any other terrible being, and coming face to face with the monster. Pity that this admirable way out of the convict difficulty would not do! Pity that the colonies should become too hot to hold them! Pity that the fastidious tastes of the colonial populations should lead them to object to our worst criminals as fellow-colonists! This is the way in which some of our most admirable schemes and our completest theories fall through. Some detestable defect in the instruments with which

we work, that destroys our calculations. How comfortable our transportation system, when the objections of those horrid colonists threw it all out, and sent our convicts back to our shores, much as the tide sends our London pollution back by river every six hours.

And so, as transportation has become gradually less and less possible, our black sheep have accumulated more and more. Various have been the suggestions concerning what should be done with such sheep. New localities have been spoken of as places to which our convicts might be sent, and all sorts of occupations have been set forth as fit for them to engage in. Meanwhile (as is too often the case when men find that there is much to be said on both sides of a question), we have adopted something of a doubtful policy, and short imprisonments and sanguine views of their reformatory influence have been the order of the day.

Perhaps, with the progress of time, there is an increased tendency among us towards leniency. Perhaps—nay, certainly—we are apt to forget an offence, especially one not committed against ourselves, while the actual life of the man who committed the offence is a great fact which we cannot forget. Then we are lenient from a consciousness of our own weak points. We think of our own past faults, and we say to ourselves, "Suppose I had been in that man's position? Suppose my temptation had been of the same class as his, where might I be now?" And then, we have a great knack at hoping, and more especially when it would be very convenient for the thing hoped for to take place. So we hope that criminals will reform, and good-naturedly say, "Let the poor wretches have a chance at any rate." Then steps in the philanthropist and says, we suppose the honest man to run no danger from the liberty of this felon after we have dealt with him. That name of criminal no longer attaches to him. He is reformed.

Is he reformed? Has he cast his skin? Is that creature belonging to the lowest type that can be called human, capable of one of the highest of human achievements and the rarest? Are the qualities generated by twenty years of going wrong, got out of the man's system? Those years of boyhood, when it is so easy to learn and to learn thoroughly, is the evil knowledge, are the evil habits, acquired in those years, and well fixed in the mind, to be got out again with a year or two of prison-discipline? The habit of idleness, which is after all at the bottom of most criminality, the aversion to fixed employment, is that got rid of? Is it easy, when the best years of life have been given to vice and indolence, to turn to and begin again in earnest, with relaxed energies and a disorganised mind? Is it easy, after one has idled away a morning, to turn to and do a day's work in the afternoon? It is possible. But it is one of the hardest of human achievements.

That reformation is possible, is as certain as that it is most uncommon; yet the authorities who have of late years regulated our prison

system, seem to think that there is nothing so common, nothing so completely to be counted upon, as the recovery of the criminal from the disease called crime.

But what is to be done then? Is the case hopeless? By no means. Only it is necessary to be infinitely less sanguine than we have been, more mistrustful of the patient's recovery, more fearful of his relapse, more watchful against the first indication of a return of the bad symptoms. And this brings us to a consideration of the practical side of the question before us. What is the right treatment for our moral patients—how are we to regulate those hospitals called Houses of Correction, where the fever of crime is specially dealt with?

First of all, then, we should be most particularly careful that the patient is not "discharged" before he is thoroughly cured; and next, that in all serious cases he should, even after his discharge, be looked upon as an out-patient, should be watched very carefully, should be required to report himself continually to the hospital authorities, should at the very first hint of a relapse be promptly brought back to hospital, and put through the "cure" again. Nay, more: after one or two such relapses, he should be consigned to an asylum for moral incurables from which there is no release. Of the regulations of that same asylum something may, perhaps, be said hereafter.

The analogy between moral and physical disease is tolerably close. The small attacks of illness which most persons are liable to at some time or other, may be got over with a little trouble, and leave little serious injury behind them; but the great diseases are different. These require vigorous professional treatment; they are hard to cure, they leave the constitution terribly weakened, and there is often great peril to the sufferer even after his cure is thought to have been effected. And we may go a step further, and say with some confidence that after a certain number of attacks and so many relapses the patient may be pronounced—a terrible doom—altogether incurable.

It was the fortune of the present Small-Beer Chronicler to know a certain family living some years since in the west of England. Among the servants attached to this household was one who, though little more than forty years old, went by the name of "Old Stephen"—a name which had attached to him, or at least the qualifying adjective had done so, partly from the antiquated appearance of the man, and partly because he was a great favourite, and the word old is generally to be considered a term of endearment. "Old Stephen" had, however, one great defect—he was given to drinking, and sometimes when the bell rang, which it was his business to answer, somebody else had to respond to the summons, and to explain in an under tone that "Old Stephen" was not very well, and had betaken himself to his bed. Still the man was borne with. His good qualities were many, his attachment to the family

was fervent and deep. He was reprimanded, scolded, reasoned with. From time to time he would hold out for a week or two, but not for longer.

Now, a time came when disaster overtook this family. The head of it was removed by death, and before long the daughters of the house were left in a foreign country with little other protection than that which "Old Stephen" could afford them. From the moment when that sense of responsibility first impressed itself on the old servant's mind, when he first felt that a time had come when his late master's children were in a measure dependent on his care, and when the time had also come when he could give a proof of the attachment which he felt towards them—from that moment "Old Stephen" came to perceive that he must give up drinking. He did so. Wherever he went with those young ladies under his charge—abroad, or in his own country among strangers or with his old associates—the man was resolute. The change was radical. The reformation was complete. The man had thrown off the disease which hung upon him. But then the constitution was a good one. It was a single fault, the nature was sound and fine.

A man such as this, with a good and a strong character disfigured by one vice, is pre-eminently capable of reforming: yet we little know what he must have gone through, before his victory was complete. The greatest strength of the cable is at its weakest point, and it must have been at his moments of greatest weakness that the real strength of "Old Stephen's" principle must have come out. Tired and worn out after a journey, in low spirits from the loss of an habitual stimulant to which his constitution had become accustomed, conscious that a "drop" would set him all right again, did it not require an almost superhuman force to resist the temptation? Or surrounded by the companions of many an ancient revel, sitting by while they caroused, urged on by every well-known voice to return to the old convivial life, jeered at for his self-denial; to hold out at such a time was surely little short of pure heroism. But the men who can engage successfully in such a warfare as this, are not so numerous as philanthropists could wish, and I fear but a few specimens of them will be found among the hardened inmates of a convict prison.

We should still consider the great analogy between crime and disease. Suppose we were to send a man with a fever upon him, to the hospital, with directions that on a certain day he was to be discharged whether he were recovered or not. Such conduct would be looked upon as sheer insanity. Yet this is what we do with the criminal. At the expiration of his sentence we open the gates of the prison and he goes forth. He is not cured of his disease. As the jailer watches his retreating figure he can see him making for the old haunts where the infection lies, and where it is a dead certainty that he will fall sick again.

The old haunts! Is it possible that such

places exist? Unhappily, there is no doubt about it. When a thief is "wanted," the policeman knows in what quarter and among what companions to look for him. There are suspicious publics, suspicious lodging-houses, suspicious landladies, and suspicious landlords. When, for the twentieth time, a well-known thief is brought up at Bow-street, the policeman who appears against him is sure to describe him as associating with well-known bad characters. Now, what one feels inclined to ask on reading for the hundredth time that stereotyped phrase, is simply this: Why are those same well-known bad characters allowed to congregate? Why do we not make a descent upon them and disperse their colony? Those felon-preserves which the police know of, ought they to be left undisturbed? That there should be "well-known" bad characters at large, and "well-known" haunts of iniquity flourishing among us, will seem, years hence when the thing will be remedied, preposterous.

It is true that justice should be tempered with mercy, but it is also true that mercy should be tempered with justice. And we must ask ourselves, what mercy is? We have got somebody else, besides the professed thief, towards whom we ought to exercise some of this heavenly quality. The industrious and unoffending citizen has perhaps some little claim on our merciful feelings, as well as the worst criminal in Westminster, or St. Giles's. If anything be neglected that can help to keep this citizen in security, there is a breach of contract on the part of those who have undertaken, as far as they reasonably can, to ensure his safety of life and property. If a man were residing in some African settlement and paid annually a certain sum to be protected against wild beasts, what would he think if he found out one night by painful experience that there was a lion's den left undisturbed in the heart of the town, the occupants of which were in the habit of turning out in search of a meal as soon as the sun was well down behind the Desert Horizon? That a stray lion should make a descent from some strange place and should do some considerable amount of mischief in the little city, would be deplorable enough; but that ferocious beasts should be left living within the city walls, with nothing to live upon but the flesh of the inhabitants, would be too preposterous. Yet are we not tolerating much such a state of things as this in our own town of London? Have we not a den of wild beasts, nay two or three such dens, in the very heart of our metropolis? *Have those savage animals any means of living, except by preying on the inhabitants of the town?* The occasional criminal we cannot guard against. The habitual bad character we can. When a man has been two or three times "in trouble," and when he has no ostensible means of getting a livelihood, it is morally certain that he will get a livelihood out of the industrious portion of the community in some illegitimate way, and it is exceedingly probable that he even may manage to squeeze the same out of their

throats, or knock it out of a hole in their skulls. Now, such a character as this should be kept out of our way. It is most probable that he will never come to good. It is quite certain that he will not come right, without a very long term of seclusion from such society as he has previously frequented, and a long period of prison discipline. To give such a man a short term of imprisonment as a mere penalty which he has to pay for the last crime he has committed, and at the expiration of that term to turn him loose again with no honest occupation open to him, even if he wanted to pursue an honest occupation—which in plain true English he does not—to act thus is to do what is worse than foolish; it is indirectly assisting at the next offence the man is guilty of.

A man's first offence against the laws might be dealt leniently with. That first fall is bad enough, and the chances of recovery are not even then too many. The second offence is a much more serious affair, and after that he will require a long and most elaborate treatment before even the smallest hope of his recovery can rationally be entertained. The criminal who has fallen many times can hardly ever be trusted with entire liberty. Some amount of surveillance should be exercised over him always: above all things, it should be a necessary condition of his liberty that he should have a certain means of living, and that he should be able to prove that he is devoting himself diligently to some recognised employment. Otherwise, in Heaven's name to prison with him, and keep him there hard and fast!

A large proportion of criminals still remains to which not even limited liberty can be safely accorded. It is sad to think that there are such cases, but it is of no use denying that the fact is so. There are many other things that are sad to think of. It is miserable to think when you go forth, free, and healthy, and happy, on a bright day in summer, that at that moment there are children lying sick in stifling rooms in Whitechapel, that there are patients in hospitals waiting till the hour comes for the operation to be performed, that there are heads bowed down with sorrow, that other heads are plotting foul sins which the night shall see executed. All these things it is sad to think of, but still they are. And so it is sad to think that bands of men are to work with fetters on them, and are to wear a dress which is disgraceful, and are to be shut out from many enjoyments and subject to many painful restrictions. Still the thing must be. Unless we are to perpetuate most monstrous inconsistencies, and punish the innocent far more than the guilty—the robbed much more than the robber—the thing must be.

Nor must we look at the position of such felons, quite from our own point of view. They are men of brutish and unsensitive nature, who miss, it is true, their liberty and their familiar vices, but who feel not as we should, the disgrace as well as the discomfort of their position. For those who have any spark of goodness latent

within them—who have some accessible place in their natures to which appeal may be made—there may be hope even within the prison-walls. But even those who may be trusted no more with their liberty should still have hope held out to them. There should be relaxations of discipline for such as were doing well in prison though they could no more be trusted out of it.

To keep the criminal from committing more crimes, and, if possible, to reform him—these are, of course, two of the chief objects to be borne in mind in his treatment. Both being little likely of attainment in old cases, his conduct must be viewed with a mistrustful eye, and, above all, his professions of penitence and reform must be regarded with suspicion. If I were chaplain of a jail, and a convict were to say to me, "It seems to do me good, like, sir, to hear you talk," or if he were to profess that my last sermon in chapel had brought tears into his eyes, or were to ask for a loan of it that he might read it in his cell—that particular sinner would be an object of special mistrust with me, and over that man I should counsel the prison authorities to keep an eye of particular watchfulness. And even supposing the penitent to be for the moment sincere, I should feel that I must not think of him as he is now, nor even of the first week or two of his restored freedom; I must look onward, and with my imagination picture that man to myself, solicited first by one small temptation and then by another. I must think of him when idleness has again become a possible thing to him; I must think of him when labour is hard to obtain, or attended by circumstances of special hardship and difficulty; I must think of him when evil companions are near him, when a good opportunity of eking out his resources by dishonest means occurs—above all, when Time, that tries all, has weakened the memory of his prison sufferings and his prison professions.

Speaking *not* as a prison-chaplain, but as a mere outside-layman, with a head to be broken and a watch to be dragged away (not to take the liberty of mentioning my wife or my daughter, for whose personal security I have, however, some selfish regard), I venture to contend that we must not have these ill-reformed felons sent back among us. If they can be made by their very bad labour to pay their own expenses, so much the better, but if not, we must even make up our minds to pay for their maintenance and safe keeping, as we pay for the maintenance of hospitals and other asylums, and for the safe keeping of idiots and lunatics.

Perhaps, it may be thought that this theme on which I have ventured to speak, is somewhat beyond the limits of Small-Beer Chronicling, and it may be held to belong to those officials who have to do with older and stronger liquors. I am sorry if this be so; but the fact is that events which have lately occurred in connexion with this subject of convict liberation, have

caused my small-beer so terribly to work and ferment, that I have been in a manner compelled to take the spigot out, and open a safety-valve.

THE DUCHESS VERONICA.

IN EIGHT CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III. ANOTHER FLORENTINE HOME.

The Villa Salviati, still universally called by that name, though many years ago it passed into the hands of the wealthy Borghesi (who sold it to the present Lord Bexley, by whom it was again sold, on his ceasing to reside at Florence, to Signor Mario), is one of the most conspicuous and the best known of the thousand villas that stud the olive-covered hills of the Valdarno around the "City of Flowers." It stands on the lowest spur of the Apennines, some two or three miles from the city, to the north, between the great Bologna road and the little stream of the Mugnone. In its outward aspect, the Villa Salviati, backed against its aged cypress grove, has more of a mediæval castellated appearance than perhaps any other of the Florentine villas. And its general appearance is very little, if at all, changed from that which it wore when it was inhabited by Duke Jacopo and the Duchess Veronica.

That lady was, as the daughter of a sovereign prince, superior in rank to any other of those who composed the court of the Grand-Duke of Tuscany. She was the daughter of Prince Carlo Cybo, the reigning sovereign of the little dominion of Massa and Carrara: a mountainous and exceedingly beautiful tract of coast and Apennine; between the frontier of the Genoese republic and that of Lucca. The name of Salviati fills a nobler space in the page of history than that of Cybo, notwithstanding its pope and dozens of cardinals of the name, and its little morsel of rocky principality. But the Salviati greatnesses had been of the civic, not the dynastic kind, and had been achieved in the old days, when citizens counted for more and princeletings for less, in Italy. And the Salviatis had been sinking in the latter generations into the subjects of a despot, while the Cybos had been rising into being despots themselves. Jacopo Salviati, therefore, wealthy, young, brilliant, admired, and Duca di San Giuliano into the bargain as he was, was considered to have "made a great match" when he married the Lady Veronica Cybo.

But "great matches" are advantages which generally have to be paid for at a very heavy rate. We have had a peep at the interior of one Florentine home, which assuredly did not appear to possess any of the elements of a happy home. Yet there also, had there been a "great match," for such, of course, the marriage of the ruin-stricken dyer's daughter with the comfortably-circumstanced patrician, Signor Canacci, must be considered to have been. Some excuse poor Caterina had for saying yes, when she should have at all hazards said no. For, want of bread is as irresistible as dangerous a counsellor. Yet her fate could hardly, even as to such matters as

meet the eye, have been worse had she refused Signor Canacci, than it was after she accepted him.

In that other Florentine home, which we have now to enter, it might have seemed that Fortune had been lavish of everything that could, as far as she was concerned, make the life of its inmates happy. There were youth, health, wealth, a noble name, a brilliant position, troops of friends. Yet "a great match," there also, ruined all. Jacopo Salviati was assuredly infinitely less to be pitied for the fate he made for himself, than poor Caterina. How crawlingly mean an ambition must it have been, that could have induced a man so circumstanced to wed a woman he could never love, for the sake of "a great match" with a "princess of a reigning house."

The Lady Veronica Cybo was that most unfortunate and pitiable of all God's creatures, a woman neither to the eye nor to the mind lovely. She had not the gift of beauty; nor had she, in compensation for the deficiency, that spiritual beauty of heart and mind and temper, which has often availed to win affection as passionate as, and more durable than, the conquests of unaided beauty. Infinitely fortunate for her, and proportionably disastrous for the other party to any such bargain, would it have been, if she could have changed her fate and her identity with the poorest black-eyed, cherry-cheeked, smiling-hearted lass, who struggled hard for a modicum of chestnuts, sufficient to keep body and soul together, on the mountains of which her father was sovereign.

There does not appear on the face of the record any reason for supposing that this unfortunate princess was in any way a worse woman than her peers of that day and country. In one respect she was unquestionably better than the great majority of them. She sought for no love save that of her husband. Of course the light-o'-love dames, who hated her, would have said that there was small virtue in not seeking that which was equally unattainable to her at any price, from either husband or lover.

But the Lady Veronica did very earnestly and passionately desire the love of her husband. Poor hapless woman! The bitterest cup that has ever been mixed for human lips, is surely that which has to be drained by those in whom a fatal incapacity for winning love is combined with a heart ardently athirst for it. Can it be wondered at, that, under the infliction of such torture, the moody brow becomes darker, the acrid temper more aggressive, the unlightsome spirits more gloomy? The jealousy, transmuting by its own odious chemistry love to hate, and seeking to inflict some portion at least of its own torments on the cause of them, comes to distort the view, to harden the heart, to exasperate the mind. And the unlovely and unloved wife, maddened with these scorpion stings, becomes absolutely hateful—a torment and a blister to the man, whose love she would give her heart's blood to conciliate.

Thus the great match, which the head of the House of Salviati had made, had the effect of fatally and finally banishing domestic peace and happiness from his hearth. But the heaviest weight of the penalty, by very far, fell on the party unsinning in the matter. The duke, who had never loved the woman he had made his wife, went his own way, heart-whole at least, if not blest; sought and found such pleasures as to his taste best supplied the place of happiness; kept out of his wife's way as much as he could; deceived her for comparative peace' sake, when it was possible to do so, and received with careless recklessness the storm of her lamentations and reproaches on shoulders weatherproof against such pelting, when it was not possible.

But the Duca di San Giuliano had become a changed man, as has been said. Not that the new passion which engrossed him rendered him a less assiduous or less admired frequenter of the court. Jacopo Salviati was still the most brilliant guest, and the most magnificent host in Florence. But the ladies found that he was changed. All that ready abundance of homage which, assorted in portions ranging in amount from an exchange of glances to a profession of eternal devotion, had formed a sort of competitive prize-fund for the emulation of the fair frail dames of the courtly circle, suddenly vanished. Bright eyes languished and obtained no responsive glances; slender fingers lingered in search of an expressive pressure, and no pressure was forthcoming; soft sighs made the lace tremulous on snowy bosoms, but the peerless duke, so susceptible a few short months ago to such appeals to his sensibility, seemed now invulnerable as adamant. The sad phenomenon was discussed amid quivering fans and rustling silks, in the sacred privacy of many a carefully-closed boudoir. And each Marchesa Giulia or Contessa Diamante had some gentle pity to bestow on some rival contessa or marchesa of the set, who was supposed to be more specially touched to the quick by this deplorable and unaccountable defection of the most gay and gallant cavalier in Tuscany.

What could have come over the noble Salviati? What was the meaning of it? Could it be a ridiculously premature and altogether abnormal fit of devotion? There were such cases on record. But the whole tenor of the duke's life and bearing seemed to scout so preposterous an idea. Salviati was as gay as—nay, if anything, gayer than—ever. His laugh was as ready and as joyous as it had ever been, his gait as light, his smile as frank and radiant. Still, there was one circumstance which, to some of the younger of the fair bevy of dames in council, seemed to afford just grounds of suspicion that the mischief might be of this nature. La Baronessa Dianora had learned from her maid, who was particularly intimate with one of the duke's own men, that his master had recently become a member of one of the religious lay fraternities, which existed in great numbers at that time. The fact of such

membership was not in any case much known or spoken of. For, it was one of the rules of these societies that no man should disclose to any one not belonging to the confraternity the fact of his enrolment in it. The evidence, however, in the present instance seemed good, and the less experienced of the debaters were inclined to attach much weight to the circumstance. Those who had been longer married, however, altogether pooh-poohed it. "Oh yes! The discipline companies!" said they. "We know what that means. Why do they meet always at night? That may do for his wife, the duchess, but not for us. I think I see Jacopo offering his shoulders to the scourge in the hand of some fat citizen, sweating his sins of false weights and clipped coin off his conscience! No, no! If Salviati is a member of one of those very convenient companies, you may be sure religion has nothing to do with the matter."

Upon the whole, the idea that the duke could have fallen into religion a good thirty years before his time was dismissed as too preposterous.

Could it be witchcraft? Ay! that, indeed, was a more probable solution of the mystery. There were not wanting among their own set those who assuredly would have the wish, and were much suspected of possessing the science, necessary for the ministering of a love-philtre to so generally coveted a prize. The Duchess Veronica herself? Ah! What more likely! The duchess, though she habitually received with magnificent hospitality all the select society of Florence, and frequently appeared, as her rank required, at the court, yet was not on such intimate terms with the generality of the Florentine ladies as to be considered one of themselves. This was in part caused by the pre-eminence of her rank; for she was the daughter of a sovereign prince—and partly by a natural reserve and seriousness of character, which indisposed her for mixing on equal terms with so very light and frivolous a society. The Duchess Veronica, moreover, was not a happy woman, and she shrank from the gay crowd, who were utterly incapable of sympathising with her sorrows, as a stricken deer slinks away from the herd. That a wife, and one of some seven or eight years' standing too, should be made seriously unhappy by a husband's infidelities appeared so ridiculous, indeed so inconceivable, that, though many a sneer was levelled at pretensions so absurd, the greater number of her female critics believed that such conduct was but a very needlessly hypocritical mask adopted for the concealment of her own irregularities. In short, the Duchess Veronica was as unpopular in the gay world of Florence as the duke was the reverse. And it was at once agreed, nem. con., that there was a considerable degree of antecedent probability that the duke's inexplicable insensibility to attractions which once had been powerful over him, was due to unfair tampering with the black art; and a peculiarly disgusting feature was added to the atrocity by the fact, that his own

wife was the person most open to suspicion of having thus endeavoured to monopolise him.

But then, again, as it was logically urged by one deeply meditating fair one, if the Lady Veronica had been practising in this manner, it followed from the facts of the case that she had been successful in her schemes. If so, things must now be going on very differently in that noble home from what they had all had opportunities—too many, indeed, as they declared with unanimous shrugs of white shoulders, and shaking of ambrosial top-knots—of observing before now. And the duchess would probably have been observed to clear her moody brow, and cease those absurd and ludicrous manifestations of jealousy, which made her a ridicule and really a disgrace, my dears, to society. Could any one say whether any such changes had been observed? And forthwith was elicited abundant testimony to the contrary. It was declared on all hands that the Duchess Veronica was more unbearable with her black humours and gloominess than ever. The Principessa Olympia had been at the palazzo after the passeggiata only yesterday evening: "And when il povero Jacopo called for his hat and gloves, and merely said to the man that he should not sup at home, you should have seen the scowl on her ladyship's face!"

"Indeed, I wonder that he ever goes home at all, for my part," said the Contessa Giacinta, who had recently been married to a man old enough to be her grandfather; "I am sure I should not, in his place."

And then came a whole chorus of pity for so unhappy a husband, and of indignant vituperation on so unreasonable and disagreeable a wife. But the mystery of the sad change in Salviati remained as dark as ever.

Upon one occasion, towards the end of October, in the year 1638, a good deal of conversation of the above described sort had passed among a knot of noble ladies assembled at the house of one of the party. The Contessa Cecilia Neri, who had taken but little active part in it, although it was supposed that she felt an especial interest in the subject (and her fair friends had accordingly been in a great degree talking at her), but who had none the less been an attentive listener to all that had been said, returned home determined at once to put into execution a plan which had occurred to her for arriving at the real truth of the matter. This lady was still unquestionably one of the most beautiful, though no longer one of the youngest, of the party; and it was generally understood that her career had been by no means a tame or uneventful one.

Immediately on reaching the solitude of her own chamber, she wrote, and forthwith despatched, the following note:

My most valued friend, I am sure that for the sake of old times—pleasanter times they were, dear friend, than any I have seen since, I trow—you will be pleased with the opportunity of doing me a little

service. There is no question of either difficulty or danger. I simply wish to know something that I am sure you can tell me, or, at all events, can find out for me. If I am not wrong in flattering myself that the occasion will be not disagreeable to you, be, at an hour after the Ave Maria to-morrow evening, at the little door in the side-alley to the left of the palazzo. I do not think you can have forgotten the way to it.

Yours, as sincerely as ever, if you will,

CECILIA.

(Superscribed)—To the most Illustrious Cavalier, the Signore Vincenzo Carlini.

This missive brought our acquaintance of the Via dei Pilastri to the little side-door in the alley between the Palazzo Neri and the next house to it, punctually at the hour named. He had forgotten neither the unobtrusive little door, nor the dark narrow stair within it communicating directly with the lady's bower, and with no other part of the house—a remarkable architectural arrangement still to be seen in existence in some of the noble homes in Florence. In fact, it was the only part of the mansion with which the Cavalier Carlini was acquainted. Though of patrician birth, he was not of those who composed the inner circle which revolved immediately around the grand-ducal centre. And from the time that the intimacy which occasioned his visits to the postern had ceased, he had never either seen the interior of the Palazzo Neri, or spoken with its mistress. Now, as he betook himself to obey her summons, his meditations were more occupied with the terms in which the contessa's note was subscribed, than with the other contents of it; and he reflected on them more with reference to that clinking of the bucket at the bottom of the well, of which he had spoken to Caterina Canacci, than in any point of view more flattering to the still beautiful Contessa Cecilia. The lady, on her side, was bent only on obtaining the information of which she was in search, and provided she got it, cared comparatively little what price she paid for it, in whatever kind of coin might be most acceptable to her old acquaintance.

Under these circumstances they were not long in understanding each other.

"Stuff and nonsense, my good friend!" replied the lady, to a declaration of Carlini, that he really could throw no light on the matter, but would endeavour to obtain the required information—for the fact was, that he was anxious to gain time to think the business over a little before betraying a secret without knowing what use it was to be made to serve—"stuff and nonsense, my good friend! You can tell me what I want to know this instant, if you will. Don't I know that you and the duke hunt in couples? Ah! you think that we women know nothing of the proceedings of our lords and masters outside their own palace doors. Pooh! pooh! Jacopo Salviati has some love affair on his hands which utterly absorbs him; some passion which has taken hold of him in good earnest. I want to know who is the object of it. A mere caprice! a curious

whim! But I will know, and I am quite sure that you can tell me."

"I think I can undertake to say," returned Carlini, "that Salviati has formed no attachment to any lady of your world. If there is anything of the sort, it must be a mere caprice for some pretty face in quite another class."

"Thank you for nothing, my most prudent Vincenzo. I could have told you as much as that. If anybody of our world was in question, I need not have asked you for information. I am very sure that it is some mere nobody; but I have reasons for choosing to know who this nobody is. Will you tell me; or must I find out from somebody else?"

"But, Signora mia, pardon me if I ask for what purpose the Contessa Cecilia dei Neri can possibly want to know the particulars of vulgar loves, that can in no wise have any interest for the world in which she lives?"

"Vulgar loves! Cospetto! When such a man as the Duca di San Giuliano—"

"Why, carissima mia Signora, dukes will have their amusements like more vulgar mortals. Is it to your ladyship that one has to confess the fact?"

"Amusements! but I tell you Salviati is utterly absorbed by this new passion. He is lost, extinguished in his own sphere. Nothing but a veritable passion could have changed the man so totally as he is changed."

"Why! your ladyship knows how Salviati is situated at home. You know what the Duchess Veronica is."

"We all know that, I think, pretty well; but what in Heaven's name has the Duchess Veronica to do in the matter?"

"Why, gentilissima Signora Cecilia, the matter stands thus: if it were, perchance, the case that any one of your ladyship's friends had any special interest in our noble friend Jacopo"—and he glanced archly at the lady as he spoke—"and if I could succeed in learning the whereabouts of this little bourgeois amourette, if amourette there be, why, all is fair in love! Our amiable Tuscan dames understand and practise the law of the gentle science in all courtesy and mutual good feeling, and there would be no harm done; but with the Duchess Veronica the case is different. She is not one of us . . . Tuscans," he added, as his quick eye noted a slight curl on the lip of the lady; "still less is she one of you. If the knowledge of the duke's peccadilloes should come to her ears, you know real mischief might be the result; you would not make any such use as that, of the information you are seeking?"

"Now, really, old friend, you ought to know me better than that," returned the Contessa; into whose mind an idea had glided, rapid as the lightning flash, at the last words of Carlini. "The real truth is, then, that one of my friends, as you say"—and she returned the arch look of intelligence with which he had previously accompanied the same words—"has a certain

amount of gentle interest in the state of Salvati's heart; but you don't think I am such a marplot, such a traitor in the camp, as to carry such tales to a man's wife, at all events to such a wife as that odious Veronica! As you truly say, she is no gentle Tuscan, neither one of us, nor tolerated by us. She is a black ugly blot on the surface of our gay and laughter-loving world, a proud, gloomy, jealous, bitter-minded, detestable woman! No, trust me, you will not find me, or any one of us, in the least inclined to fight the Duchess Veronica's battles."

"In that case, I think I shall be able to gratify your ladyship; but I am sure that the amabilissima Signora Cecilia will not have been offended, that I should have been cautious not to let trouble arise out of matters that ought never to pass out of the domain of light-hearted laugh and jest, and mutual toleration. Say I well?"

"Excellently well! most amiable of philosophers! And now, out with the secret! For I am very sure that you can tell it me on the spot, as well as a week hence."

"There is no deceiving your ladyship's practised penetration!" said Carlini, with a profound inclination. "Here it is then. Salvati's flame for the nonce, is a certain Signora Canacci, who lives in the Via dei Pilastri. The husband is some seventy or eighty years old, I believe. There has at least been no difficulty in the way to stimulate the noble duke's ardour in the chase."

"Ah! . . . that is it, is it! Methinks I have heard of that same Caterina Canacci. Of very low origin, was she not, much below the position of old Canacci, her husband; and something miraculously beautiful, I think I have heard, eh?"

"Well! a pretty face enough! a very pretty face! But what would you have? A mere doll! Neither expression, manner, nor grace! How should it be otherwise?"

"Now listen, Vincenzo mio! I have a fancy; . . . and you know perhaps that the shortest and easiest way to have done with my fancies—is to satisfy them. They are apt to become troublesome, . . . and sometimes even dangerous otherwise. I must have a portrait of this superlatively beautiful Caterina Canacci. And you must manage to get me one, somehow or other. It cannot be very difficult to a man of your resources."

"Peerless Signora Cecilia, I am delighted to have it in my power to satisfy you on that head with the greatest readiness. It so happens that among a few other souvenirs of the same sort, I possess a portrait of the lady in question. In some cases, Signora Cecilia, the features of one who has been loved, remain so graven on the heart, that no painter's art is needed to make the memory of them eternal. But La Caterina poveretta! When one does not bring even a scar on the heart away to remember a love-passage by, why, a touch of the artist's craft may serve as a memorial of what otherwise would be wholly forgotten.

"Aha! friend Vincenzo! So you were beforehand in Casa Canacci with our poor friend Jacopo, eh?"

"Signora Contessa! The grandes of the court have an infinity of advantages over us poor simple cavalieri. But always to be first served at the shrine of beauty is not among the number, at least in Tuscany." The falseness of this boast the reader knows.

"Bravo! Signore Cavaliere Vincenzo! When shall I have the portrait?"

"Within an hour after I quit the gracious presence of your ladyship. Shall I return with it, and myself consign it to your fair hands?"

"Nay! that would be trespassing too much on your kindness. Let it be given in a sealed envelope to my maid—you won't have forgotten Geppina—she can be trusted, as you know; and it will be all well."

"Your ladyship shall be punctually served," said Carlini, as he stooped to kiss the lady's hand. "May I hope," he added, rather hesitatingly, but looking into her eyes the while—"may I hope, that sometimes in the dull evenings between this and the beginning of Carnival, I may sometimes have the honour of an hour of your society?"

"To be sure! why not? my very good friend, Signore Vincenzo. Just at present, it is true, I am much occupied. But you shall hear from me. You may depend on hearing from me, as soon as I am able to permit myself the pleasure of a visit from you."

Carlini bowed again and took his leave, perfectly well understanding that there was to be no renewal of the terms on which he and the Contessa Cecilia had once been together; and that the treacherous signature to her note had been merely a lure to obtain from him what she wanted. They were not blessings on the head of his old friend, which he invoked as he passed out of the little postern into the alley, and from that into the Via Maggio, which was the site of the Palazzo dei Neri. But it was no part of Signor Vincenzo Carlini's philosophy to permit little disappointments of this nature to "pass," as he had phrased it, "from the domain of smiles and laughter," into the region of serious troubles and heart-burnings. More specially still, it was wholly contrary to his practice to quarrel with those above him on the wheel of fortune. It appeared to him the same thing as quarrelling with his bread-and-butter, or, more absurdly still, with the chances of having butter on his bread. So the Lady Cecilia had Caterina's portrait in her hands within an hour from the time Signor Carlini left her.

When the Contessa Cecilia had first conceived the idea of making use of her old acquaintance, Vincenzo Carlini, for the purpose of finding out what was really at the bottom of the change which all the court circle had observed in the Duca di San Giuliano, she had merely been actuated by a woman's curiosity to know the person of her rival. She had listened to all the

nonsense chattered by the ladies around her on the subject, without taking any part in their speculations, knowing right well, pur troppo—as she would have said in her own Tuscan—that some new and unusually absorbing passion was the real cause of Salviati's recent insensibility to all the agaceries that could be brought to bear upon him. Several of the “ornaments of the court” of Ferdinando the Second had been more or less piqued and irritated by this rebellion against legitimate authority; but the only heart that had really been hit hard by it was that of the Contessa Cecilia. She accordingly had been more clear-sighted than the rest, in divining the true state of the case.

The Duchess di San Giuliano, as has been said, was by no means popular among the light-hearted and light-mannered beauties of the Tuscan court. But, as will be readily imagined under the circumstances, she was especially the object of the Signora Cecilia's aversion. A reference to the best authorities on the nature and idiosyncrasy of the female heart, would lead to the further belief that that high-born lady did not feel kindly towards the unknown beauty whose low-born charms had so wrought on the noble duke. Further still, the recorded effects which have been observed with remarkable uniformity to follow the “*sprete injuria formæ*,” justify us in concluding, that it would not be unpleasing to the neglected fair one to have visited with a certain amount of punishment the recreant knight himself.

Now, unfortunately, the word which Carlini had let fall about the mischief likely to follow from any communication of the facts of Salviati's infidelity, to the duchess, had suddenly suggested to the lovely and amiable Cecilia method by which, as it seemed to her, she might succeed in killing three birds with one stone.

“Now for a sight of this redoubtable rival!” sneered the contessa in soliloquy; and she clutched the packet containing the miniature, and impatiently tore open the envelope. “Now we shall see what the dyer's daughter is like—a dyer's daughter they say, whose sire and mother both died in the plague year! Why, what is the use of noble blood and gentle birth, if the dregs of the populace—born in squalor, and reared in misery—can rival us in all a woman cares to live for! Now for it!” And she opened the case of the little portrait.

“Bah!” she cried, after a long and earnest look, during which her handsome but haughty features had curled into a sneering smile. “Bah! is that all?” And taking a taper in her hand she approached the mirror on her toilette-table, and seating herself in front of it, scanned the two faces before her. The comparison seemed satisfactory to her.

“A pretty face!” she said. “Yes, certainly a pretty face—pink cheeks, white forehead, black eyebrows, deep-blue eyes, crimson lips! A very

pretty bit of colouring! Contour, meaning, grace, expression, fire, passion—nothing. Bah! That won't last long. But that it should have endured at all, merits, methinks, some little measure of punishment—punishment which, I take it, will have the effect of bringing back our stray sheep to its proper fold! This pink and white doll shall be taught to seek her lovers among her fellows for the future. And you proud duchess, with her kill-joy face, and insolently censorious ways, shall find that it would have been more for her happiness never to have come to our bright Florence, to lord it over Tuscan dames.

With these thoughts in her heart, she sat down before a writing-table, and penned in large coarse characters, which perfectly masked her own handwriting, the following billet:

A true friend to the Duchessa di San Giuliano—perhaps the only one she has in this vile, dissolute court—sends her the enclosed miniature. It is the portrait of one Caterina Canacci, who lives in the palazzo of that name, in the Via dei Pilastri; an abandoned woman, who has so bewitched the noble Jacopo Salviati, that his days are passed in thinking only of her, and his nights in her company. Should any doubt of the truth of these facts remain in the mind of the duchess, she may with ease dispel them by acquiring certain evidence of the duke's frequent visits to the house indicated.

(Subscribed) A CITIZEN AND LOYAL SUBJECT OF MASSA.

When she had completed the above note, and placed it in an envelope, together with the miniature, addressed to the duchess, at her Villa Salviati, she rang her hand-bell, and said to Geppina, when she answered it:

“Let one of your own friends, Geppina, some one you can depend on, and who is not known in any way as belonging to this house, take this packet to Villa Salviati, leave it, and come away without waiting to be asked any questions. And take care he speaks no word either before or afterwards, of his errand.”

The packet was at Villa Salviati the following morning before the duchess was up; and how it was placed in her hands as she sat at her morning toilette shall next be told.

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